No333 الاهرام ويكلي

Al-Ahram Weekly

Published in Cairo by AL-AHRAM established in 1875

10 - 16 July 1997 | 18 Pages | P.T.75



Kohl, portrait of the week by Bahgory

Summer reshuffle strengthens PM

REACTION to a limited cabinet reshuffle, announced by Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri on Tuesday, has been mixed, although most analysts agree that it will accelerate the pace of economic reform and tighten Ganzouri's hold on power, reports **Shaden Shehab**. Three ministers were dropped in the reshuffle, four newcomers brought in and six cabinet members were given new responsibilities or had to surrender some of their responsibilities to colleagues.

Galal Amin, a professor of economics, said that although the reshuffle was limited, it did indicate the direction of government thinking. The elevation of Youssef Boutros Ghali to the economy portfolio was, said Amin, particularly significant: "Ghali represents the philosophy of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund [IMF], which means that we are going in line with it, but at an even faster pace," Amin said. He described the outgoing Economy Minister Nawal El-Tatawi as "less active and less forceful."

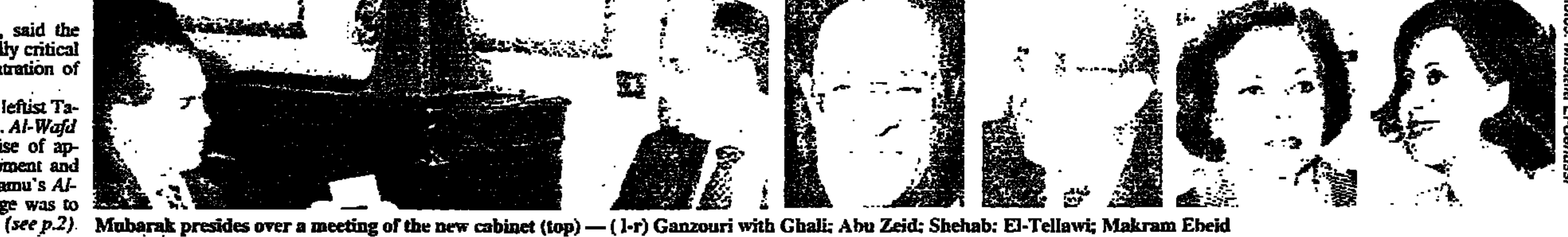
Arvind Subramanian, the IMF representative in Cairo, said the cabinet changes "will accelerate and strengthen the economic reform process which Egypt has already started." The reshuffle, he added, shows that "Egypt is committed to the reform process and is making it its priority."

Mustafa El-Sayed, a political science professor, said the changes did not meet expectations. He was especially critical of the reshuffle for having "led to a great concentration of powers in the hands of the prime minister."

The newspapers of the liberal Wafd Party and the leftist Tagammu criticised the limited scope of the reshuffle. *Al-Wafd* noted that the government did not keep its promise of appointing ministers to take charge of Sinai development and the Toshka land reclamation project, while Tagammu's *Al-Ahali* said that the major achievement of the change was to give Ganzouri additional powers. *(see p.2)*



photo: Abdel-Sattar Youssef



photos: Mustafa El-Sanussi

Mubarak presides over a meeting of the new cabinet (top) — (l-r) Ganzouri with Ghali; Abu Zeid; Shehab; El-Tellawi; Makram Ebeid

Change of governors

UNDER a presidential decree issued by President Hosni Mubarak yesterday, 10 new governors were appointed and four governors were shifted to other provinces. Abdel-Rehim Shehata, previously governor of Giza, became governor of Cairo; Maher El-Guindi, previously governor of Gharbiya, became governor of Giza; Abdel-Salam Mahgoub, previously governor of Ismailia, became governor of Alexandria; and Mamdouh El-Zuheiri, previously governor of Southern Sinai, became governor of Suez.

The newcomers were: Mustafa Abdel-Kader, Minya; Sabri El-Biali, Qalyubiya; Mustafa Afifi, Southern Sinai; Ahmed Abdel-Ghaffar, Gharbiya; Kamal Amer, Marsa Matrouh; Saad Ali Abu-Reeda, the Red Sea; Ali Hefzi, Northern Sinai; Osman Metwalli Shahin, the New Valley; Abdel-Aziz Ezzeddin Raslan, Ismailia; and Said El-Naggar, Beni-Suef.

Mustafa Afifi had previously served as commander of the republican guard; Osman Shahin was chief of the organisation and administration authority of the armed forces; Ali Hefzi was assistant to the Defence Minister; Saad Abu-Reeda was chief of operations of the armed forces and Kamal Amer was chief of military intelligence.

New frigates

IN A GRAND ceremony scheduled for Sunday, President Hosni Mubarak will hoist the Egyptian flag atop two American-made Perry class frigates that joined the Egyptian navy recently, reports **Galal Nassar** from Alexandria.

The US is also providing Egypt with 10 SH2G anti-submarine helicopters which can be based on board the frigates as well as the destroyers serving with the Egyptian navy. With the helicopters on board, the two frigates, named Mubarak and Taba, will be able to operate as mobile defence units protecting other vessels against air and sea attacks. One of the two frigates will take part in a joint naval exercise with Saudi Arabia next month.

INSIDE

Netanyahu blinks to govern

Infighting in the Israeli cabinet has ended, for now at least, as David Levy outmanoeuvres Ariel Sharon, writes **Graham Usher** from Jerusalem

The crisis in Israel's Likud-led coalition was resolved on Wednesday when, after a hiatus of three weeks, Binyamin Netanyahu presented his new cabinet to the Knesset. Against all predictions, Dan Meridor's replacement as Israel's finance minister was not the current national infrastructure minister, Ariel Sharon, but rather the ex-justice minister and politically unaffiliated lawyer, Yaacov Neeman. The other change was the appointment of Likud's coalition chairman, Michael Eitan, as science minister.

More significant than the appointments, however, was the bargain struck between Netanyahu and his foreign minister, David Levy. After four meetings between the two, and hours of gruelling negotiations between their aides, Levy finally extracted from Netanyahu the price for his and his Gesher faction's ongoing participation in the coalition. The bill added up to Netanyahu bowing to Gesher on "every issue we fought for," said Gesher Knesset member, Michael Kleiner, triumphantly.

According to the agreement on "work methods and procedures in the political realm" signed between them, it is now the foreign minister (rather than Netanyahu or his various advisers) who is responsible for Israel's foreign policy, including all matters pertaining to the peace process with the Palestinians. Levy also won a commitment that Gesher be consulted ahead of any budgetary decisions, ensuring that public expenditure will be focused on urban renewal and employment opportunities in Israel's poorer development towns where Levy and Gesher draw their support.

Finally, Netanyahu agreed to dissolve the so-called political-security or kitchen cabinet made up of himself, Levy and Yitzak Mordechai, which had hitherto exercised formal authority over Israeli defence and foreign policy. Sharon had made membership of the "kitchenette" a condition for his acceptance of the Finance portfolio. Outflanked by Levy and Mordechai — neither of whom wanted Sharon encroaching on their ministerial turfs — Israel's most famous hawk has seen both the Finance Ministry and a greater say over the peace process slip from his grip. And Sharon is none too pleased about it.

The same may be said for Israel's far right National Religious Party (NRP), which, with two ministers and nine Knesset members, is the third largest bloc in the coalition. While welcoming the appointment of Neeman (who is known to be close to the NRP and the Gush Emunim settler movement), NRP spokespersons said they were "scandalised" by the deal struck between Netanyahu and Gesher on social issues. At a crisis meeting on 8 July, Netanyahu dealt with the NRP the same way he had with Levy and Gesher — by caving in to their demands. Netanyahu agreed to consult with the NRP before any budgetary decisions were taken, vowing that the "needs" of Jewish settlers and Torah institutions would be taken into account in any public expenditure plans.

As for Israel's Labour-led opposition parties, these were again wrong-footed by a prime minister who seems to have a Houdini-like ability to escape the snares set by himself. In a lacklustre no confidence vote in the Knesset on 7 July, the coalition defeated the opposition by 48 votes to 39. This second escape in as many weeks shows that Netanyahu can "fool all his ministers all of the time", said Meretz leader, Yossi Sarid, wearily.

But the key behind this latest debacle in Israeli politics lies less in Netanyahu's skill than in his susceptibility to pressure. After Meridor's resignation, Netanyahu turned to Sharon to shore up his crumbling support in Likud. No sooner had he done so, however, than he was faced with the countervailing pressure of Levy and Mordechai. These ministers were joined in their efforts by Israel's president, Ezer Weizman, and also the US ambassador to Israel, Martyn Indyk, both of whom made it known that Sharon should not be allowed anywhere near the negotiations with the Palestinians. Faced with a united front of Levy, Mordechai, Weizman and the Americans, Netanyahu, again, caved in. He appealed to Neeman to take the Finance Ministry and, after promising Sharon the moon, left him with nothing.

It is too soon to say what impact the reshuffle will have on the peace process. Over the last two weeks, Mordechai has engaged in quiet diplomacy with Palestinian Authority (PA) officials to get the talks moving again. One fruit of this has been the partial restoration of cooperation between the PA and Israeli army, with the Palestinian police last week forcibly removing Palestinian protesters from the Moraj settlement in Gaza and, over the weekend, mobilising to quell the protests in Hebron. In return, Israel has agreed to allow a daily bus shuttle for PA employees to move between the West Bank and Gaza "as a first step" towards establishing a safe passage between the two areas. Israeli sources also predict that an agreement will be reached soon on opening the Palestinian airport in Gaza.

But the real snag remains the issue of settlement construction. So far, Yasser Arafat, backed by Egypt, has insisted on at least a temporary cessation of settlement building as the condition of any return to negotiations. Israel has been just as adamant in rejecting such a condition. Between the PA and Israel it is going to be a matter of who blinks first. But, if anything can be gleaned from the latest stand off between Levy and his prime minister, it is that Netanyahu, when pressed, blinks a lot.

Militants declare ceasefire

Leaders of the militant Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya and Jihad groups have instructed their followers, from behind bars, to halt all anti-government acts of violence. **Khaled Dawoud** reports

In a surprise appeal, made at the opening on Saturday of the military trial of 98 Al-Gama'a militants, jailed leaders of the underground Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya and Jihad groups asked their followers to end all acts of violence against the government. Defendants at the trial are charged with carrying out bomb attacks against banks and assassinating, or attempting to assassinate, police officers in 1993 and 1994 in one of the worst waves of terror in the campaign to overthrow the government.

"We appeal to our brothers to stop all violent activities inside and outside Egypt and to stop issuing statements calling for violent action," said Mohamed Amin Abdel-Halim, one of the militants on trial.

He repeated the appeal several times, and said that it was issued by leaders of Al-Gama'a and Jihad who are serving life imprisonment terms for their involvement in the assassination of the late President Anwar El-Sadat in 1981. The leaders are Abboud El-Zomor, Nageh Ibrahim, Karam Zohdi, Hamdi Abdel-Rahman, Fouad El-Dawalibi and Ali El-Sherif.

A statement issued by the Jihad group last month confirmed that it had closed ranks with Al-Gama'a, after a years-long dispute, under the leadership of Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, now serving a life sentence in New York for his involvement in the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Centre.

Abdel-Halim, who made the appeal shortly after the opening of Saturday's trial, said the call to halt violence was unconditional. "We are asking our brothers not to launch any more military operations even if the government continues to attack us," he told *Al-Ahram Weekly* from the iron cage in which he and other militants were locked.

Asked why the appeal was issued at this time, Abdel-Halim said that this was "in the interest of Islam and Muslims and because we see no more use in continuing the bloodshed."

The Al-Gama'a and Jihad groups launched their latest campaign of violence toward the end of 1992 with the aim of overthrowing the government and establishing a strict Islamic state. In 1993 and 1994, they made abortive assassination attempts against Atef Sidki, prime minister at the time, Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi and Information Minister Safwat El-Sherif. They also targeted top security officials, foreign tourists, Copts, secular intellectuals and banks in order to destabilise the government by damaging the economy.

A similar call for halting violence was made by a member of Al-Gama'a as he stood trial last year for carrying out attacks against policemen in Aswan. But Abdel-Halim said that that had been a "personal initiative" and not a decision by the Al-Gama'a and Jihad leaders.

Montasser El-Zayyat, a lawyer for the militants detained for six months in late 1994, told the *Weekly* that he believed the appeal made at the trial was authentic. "Those who issued the appeal are the actual leaders of the Al-Gama'a and Jihad. Thus, I expect members of both groups will be responsive," he said. El-Zayyat had made several attempts in the past to broker a deal between the government and the militants to end the violence, but without success. These attempts foundered because the militants made an end of violence conditional on the government's agreement to apply Islamic *Shari'a* [law], release all jailed militants and abstain from putting them on trial in military courts.

Saturday's trial of the 98 militants, including five who are still at large and one who was killed in a shootout with police forces, was the largest since Sadat's 1981 assassination. And for the first time in the history of military justice, the defendants standing trial included five women.

Defendants are charged with planting bombs outside nine banks in Cairo and Giza, killing Police Maj. Gen. Raouf Khairat, and attempting to kill four police officers at the Abu Zaabal prison where many militants are jailed.

As the trial opened at the Haikstep army camp, 35 kilometres northeast of Cairo, strict security measures were enforced. Families of the defendants and journalists were thoroughly searched and the trial did not start until noon. Hearings lasted for nearly three hours, barely enough time to read out the names of the defendants and the charges levelled against them.

The defendants included Mohamed Fawzi, who had already been sentenced to death by a State Security Court for his involvement in the killing of a policeman two years ago in Suez City. He stood in the iron cage wearing a red prison uniform, an indication that he was on death row. His lawyer, Saad Hasaballah, said Fawzi faced execution at any time because the death ruling has been ratified by the authorities.

The case also involves a 54-year-old mother, her two daughters and two sons. When the presiding judge called the names of the five women involved in the case, their male relatives responded instead, surprising the judge and those attending the trial. The militants bar women from speaking loudly because they believe that their voice is an "*a'wra*" or indecency.

Except for one woman, who has been detained, like most of the male defendants, for nearly three years, the other four were released on bail following their arrest because the charges against them are minor. They were re-arrested two days before the opening of the trial in order to ensure that they would make an appearance before the court. The judge granted a request by defence lawyers for the release of the four women again pending a resumption of hearings.

At a second session of the trial, yesterday, all the defendants pleaded "not guilt" to the charges against them. The presiding judge adjourned proceedings to 19 July.

Ganzouri presses for speed

Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri carried out a limited cabinet reshuffle, dropping three ministers and bringing in four new faces. Shaden Shehab and Nevine Khalil report

A limited cabinet reshuffle, rumoured for months, was announced on Tuesday, with Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri dropping three ministers, all women, and bringing in four new ones — two women and two men. Six other cabinet members were given new responsibilities or had some of their responsibilities shifted to colleagues.

After the 10 ministers were sworn in by President Hosni Mubarak, El-Ganzouri told reporters the reshuffle was aimed at speeding up the cabinet's "performance in the spheres of production and [public] services because action in the current phase requires speed and decisiveness."

One of the newcomers is Moufid Shehab, president of Cairo University, who was appointed minister of higher education and minister of state for scientific research. The latter portfolio was previously held by Venice Kamel Gouda, who was dropped from the cabinet in the reshuffle. Higher education was previously the responsibility of Education Minister Hussein Kamel Bahaeddin. This portfolio has now been split into two, making Shehab responsible for universities and higher institutes and Bahaeddin responsible for all pre-university schooling.

El-Ganzouri, who formed his cabinet in January 1996, said the split was meant to "reduce the burdens" of Bahaeddin "because there are 17 million pupils and students, who include one million students enrolled in 13 national universities."

Another newcomer was Mahmoud Abdel-Halim Abu Zeid, an irrigation expert, who was made minister of public works and water resources, replacing Mohamed Abdel-Hadi Radi, who died last November. The post has remained vacant since his death.

Mervat El-Tellawi, previously Egyptian ambassador in Tokyo, joined the cabinet for the first time as minister of insurance and social affairs, replacing Amal Osman, who held the portfolio for the past 21 years. Osman, who first joined the cabinet while the late President Anwar El-Sadat was in office, was the longest serving cabinet minister. She recently came under fire in the Arabic-language press for bureaucracy and red tape at her ministry, with columnists underlining the need for new blood.

The fourth newcomer was Nadia Makram Ebeid, who was appointed minister of state for environment affairs — previously one of the responsibilities of Atef Ebeid, now Minister of the Public Business Sector.

Ebeid also lost a second portfolio to Mohamed Zakaria Abu Amer. The latter, who previously served as minister of state for parliamentary affairs, was made minister of state for administrative development. As in Bahaeddin's case, El-Ganzouri said the change was meant to reduce Atef Ebeid's "burdens."

Youssef Boutros Ghali, a minister of state attached to El-Ganzouri's office, was promoted to economy minister, replacing Nawal El-Tatawi. Ghali, a nephew of former UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali, joined the cabinet for the first time in 1993 as minister of state for international cooperation. His main task was to promote Egypt to foreign investors, but he was replaced in 1996 by El-Tatawi who held the portfolios of economy as well as international cooperation.

Now, Ghali replaces El-Tatawi, the first woman ever to hold the economy portfolio. She had come under fire for lack of experience and inability to take decisions. She was also criticised for a possible conflict of interest because her husband runs a brokerage company.

The post of state minister for international cooperation went to Zafer El-Bishri in addition to his job as state minister for planning. El-Ganzouri himself serves as Minister of Planning and International Cooperation.

Mahmoud Sherif, minister of local administration, continues to serve as a cabinet minister, but the name of his portfolio was changed to minister of rural development. "The new ministry aims to develop the rural areas which constitute a major and important sector in the structure of the Egyptian society," El-Ganzouri said.

The cabinet reshuffle, the first since El-Ganzouri became prime minister, had been anticipated for some time. In a press interview published last Saturday, President Hosni Mubarak said that a reshuffle was on the way but underlined the importance of choosing the new ministers carefully. News that the change was imminent circulated on Monday following a meeting between Mubarak and El-Ganzouri.

Youssef Boutros Ghali, Atef Ebeid and Moufid Shehab, who were travelling abroad, were summoned back home for the swearing-in ceremony. Ghali cut short a visit to London, Ebeid flew back from Abu Dhabi, and Shehab from Kuwait.

The newcomers

• **Moufid Shehab**, 61, a professor of international law, served as President of Cairo University since September 1993. He also heads the Arab and foreign affairs and national security committee of the Shura Council. He served on a national committee that held complicated negotiations with Israel for the recovery of the Taba region in the Sinai desert.

• **Mahmoud Abu Zeid**, 62, obtained a doctorate in irrigation from California University in 1962 and served as the head of the National Water Research Centre since 1979. He previously served as technical manager of the Irrigation Minister's office.

• **Mervat El-Tellawi**, 60, began a diplomatic career soon after her graduation from the American University in Cairo in 1963. She was attached to the Egyptian mission to the European headquarters of the United Nations, was named ambassador in Vienna in 1987 and ambassador in Tokyo in 1993.

• **Nadia Makram Ebeid**, 54, holds a masters degree from the American University in Cairo. She worked with the UN Development Programme between 1965 and 1991, as an assistant professor in a Nigerian University and as a regional expert on women's affairs with a UN organisation.

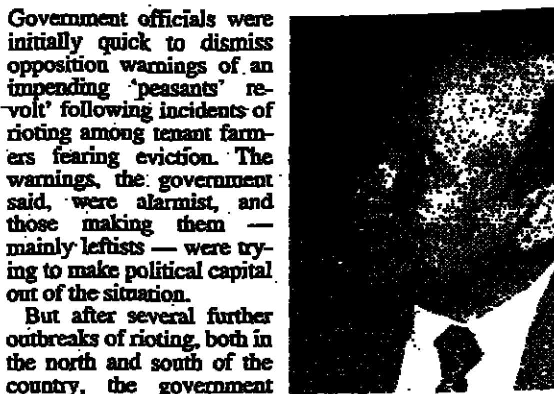


photo: Mohamed Wassem

Nafie celebrated: Hundreds of journalists gathered at the journalists' club last Monday to express their gratitude to Ibrahim Nafie for his outstanding efforts during four consecutive years as the Press Syndicate chairman. Nafie played a major and effective role in repealing Law 93 that had provided for harsh penalties against journalists. He was able to unite the journalists and honestly convey their demands to the government. During the ceremony, Nafie thanked the journalists and said, "It is one of the best moments of my life. It is a nice gesture to a colleague who spent his youth with you in mutual give-and-take. I love you all from the bottom of my heart."

Looking for a safety net

The government, finally alarmed by a wave of peasant riots, is acting to solve the problems of tenant farmers facing the threat of eviction. Gamal Essam El-Din reports



Youssef Wali

Government officials were initially quick to dismiss opposition warnings of an impending 'peasants' revolt' following incidents of rioting among tenant farmers fearing eviction. The warnings, the government said, were alarmist, and those making them — mainly leftists — were trying to make political capital out of the situation.

But after several further outbreaks of rioting, both in the north and south of the country, the government has reviewed the situation and decided that some action was necessary.

The farmers' protests were sparked by a new law regulating the landlord-tenant relationship. Passed in 1992, the law gave a five-year grace period before full implementation to allow both landlords and tenants to adjust. It raised the rent of agricultural land from seven to 22 times the value of the land tax. Once the grace period expires in October, rents will be fully liberalised, becoming subject to the provisions of the Civil Code.

President Hosni Mubarak addressed the issue during a visit last week to the huge land reclamation site at Toshka in the south-western desert. The president told reporters he was mindful of the problems of tenant farmers who might be adversely affected by the full application of the law. He affirmed, however, that 90 per cent of the problems resulting from the new law had already been solved during the five-year grace period, and he pledged that solutions would be worked out for the remaining problems by October. "The Prime Minister [Kamal El-Ganzouri] has drawn up a plan devising solutions to the remaining problems and each governor will contribute to this plan in his area," Mubarak said.

Ali Saeda, chairman of the Agriculture Ministry's Services Department, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that provincial agricultural departments have been instructed by Minister Youssef Wali to study the cases of tenants who might be adversely affected by the new law. These departments will form committees to investigate disputes brought about by the new law and come up with solutions. Tenants facing eviction will be provided with alternative land in reclamation projects in the Sinai and Western deserts. Saeda also said that the Principal Bank for Development and Agricultural Credit has been instructed by Wali to provide easy-term loans to farmers who wish to buy their rented land.

According to the bank's chairman, Hassan Khedr, LE100 million has been earmarked for this purpose. A tenant farmer will be provided with loans of up to 70 per cent of the price of a plot of land not exceeding 10 feddans, he said. The loan is repayable over seven years.

Prime Minister Ganzouri also issued instructions that the so-called agrarian reform lands owned by the state and other lands owned by the Ministry of *Al-Awqaf* (religious endowments) be exempted from any rent increases provided by the law. The total acreage of these lands is a modest 130,000 feddans.

Wali had accused opposition parties, particularly the leftist Tagammu and Islamist-oriented Labour Party, of organising public rallies to incite tenants to protest by illegal means. He charged that these parties, which "suffer from ideological stagnation," were using the situation to make political gains and win popularity, while disregarding conditions on the ground. In Beni Suef Governorate, he maintained, "opposition parties played the largest role in inciting citizens." Wali went as far as to claim that some opposition leaders, who owned hundreds of feddans of agricultural land, had not bothered to improve the conditions of their own tenant farmers.

He added that the number of complaints submitted to cabinet ministers by tenants fearing eviction does not exceed 400. Tenant farmers, he said, have the right to seek the assistance of the local agricultural department in solving their problems.

According to Wali, the amount of land cultivated on a cash-rent and share-crop basis has declined from 40 per cent of the nation's total cultivated area in 1961 to 23.7 per cent in 1992. By 1996 the figure stood at 14.7 per cent. In contrast, the amount of land cultivated by owners rose from 60 per cent in 1961 to 76.3 per cent in 1992 and 85.3 per cent in 1996. The picture now is similar to that in 1939, when only 16 per cent of the nation's land was farmed by tenants, and 84 per cent by owners.

Essam Radi, chairman of parliament's Agriculture Committee, said that no bills seeking to modify the 1992 law, or even suggesting an extension of the five-year grace period, had been submitted to the committee by opposition parties.

"The landlord-tenant law, which was passed by the Assembly in June 1992, raised the rent of agricultural land from seven to 22 times the value of the land tax to redress the injustice done to landowners whose rental income has declined over the years," Radi said. "Extending the grace period would only complicate conditions further and prolong the injustice. We have to face the fact that, sooner or later, agricultural rents should be liberalised and governed by the Civil Code. It is better to liberalise these rents as soon as possible to create a more balanced relationship between tenants and landlords."

Kamal El-Shazli, minister of state for parliamentary affairs, told a recent meeting of ruling National Democratic Party MPs that while the "law was passed to be implemented," and the government was unswerving in its commitment to liberalisation and market economy laws, it would nevertheless remain committed to addressing the negative impact of these laws on lower-income groups, particularly farmers and workers.

Egyptians outraged by religious insults

Anti-Israeli sentiment mounted to fever pitch after insults were directed at the Prophet Mohamed and other Muslim and Christian symbols. Mariz Tadros investigates

Temperatures among Egyptians are running high, and promise to rise further, following the recent acts of religious desecration against Muslim and Christian symbols which have taken place in Israel.

It all began with the Hebron poster depicting the Prophet Mohamed as a pig, with a hoof writing in an open book labelled "the Qur'an". After this came a Jewish magazine's publication of an image of the Virgin Mary with the head of a cow. Two days later five paint-splattered copies of the Qur'an were ripped up at a Hebron school.

Almost a week after the last act of desecration, Egyptians are outraged, religious leaders are calling for the death penalty for the culprits, syndicates are calling for united Arab action against Israel and the opposition is urging rigorous retaliatory measures by the Egyptian government.

Last week, the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar, Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, said that the culprit who insulted the Prophet Mohamed deserves the death penalty, an opinion shared by the majority of Muslims.

Mohamed Emara, professor of Islamic Law and a distinguished Islamic writer, said that this was only one incident in a series of violent acts committed against Muslim holy sites and symbols. He emphasised the Israeli authorities acquiescence to acts of violence against Islam. "When those posters were hung in Hebron, it was in the presence of Israeli soldiers, and when copies of the Qur'an were shredded in the school, it was the act of Israeli soldiers," he said

"The hooliganism we have seen is led, justified and protected by the Israeli government and its American ally," Emara added. He called upon mosques and churches, universities and syndicates and civil society to rise up in protest to express their outrage. "If the government does not respond to these popular feelings on a political level, the gap between public opinion and the authorities will only widen further, and thus the government will lose the respect of its subjects, which would no doubt be a threat to internal stability," he said.

"We cannot separate what happened and Israel's general policy towards us," said Talaat Romeih of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party. The desecration of Muslim and Christian holy persons, Romeih pointed out, strikes at the very roots of the conflict between Israel and the Arab world. "The battle is no longer over treaties, settlements, autonomy and self-determination; it has turned into a campaign against Islam and Christianity in the Occupied Territories: this is a new war," he said. The real purpose behind such acts, he insisted, was simply to humiliate and degrade Islam. "They have long desecrated holy sites for both Christians and Muslims. The issue is their disrespect of other people's religions".

Romeih was disappointed with the passivity with which these "horrendous acts" have been met. "The Arab reaction, whether on the popular or political level, is not an adequate response to the aggressions and insults committed ever since Netanyahu came to power."

Fathi Mahmoud of the Nasserist Party was equally disgruntled with what he deemed to be a low-key response to a very grave incident. He stressed that the only thing for the Egyptian government to do now was announce an economic boycott of Israel.

Mahmoud insisted that, despite the Israeli government's official apology, the desecration was an explicit manifestation of its racist policy. "It [Israel] has long been involved in accusing governments and individuals of discrimination and racial hatred towards them. They bully nations, accusing them of anti-Semitism, and make a profit out of it, as they are doing to Germany. Now there is no excuse for the Israeli government and their American backers to accuse others of being anti-Semitic. They have revealed their true, ugly face."

Mahmoud warned that the incidents which took place would undoubtedly provoke violent reactions in the Occupied Territories as well as Arab countries. "We do not support violence but we cannot blame the Egyptian people if in the midst of their intense anger, they attack Israeli and Zionist sites," he said.

Hussein Abdel-Razek of the leftist Tagammu Party commented, "Israel is a country for Jews and not for everyone. Others, whether Muslims or Christians, are considered second class and thus fundamentalism and enmity towards other people's religions thrive, no matter how much they speak of secularism."

Abdel-Razek argued that the way in which the Arab world has treated the incidents reveals only too well the extent of their apathy towards Israeli provocations, which "only encourages and perpetuates Israeli aggression."

He, too, believed that a harsher stand towards the Israeli government was necessary. "The least Egypt's government can do is to freeze all relations and perhaps call its ambassador in Israel back for consultations," he said.

Ibrahim Abaza of the Wafd Party was of the same opinion and questioned whether a reverse situation would have drawn such a calm reaction. "Suppose it was Egyptian youths who insulted Jewish religion, do you think the Israeli government would have been so calm?"

In a Cairo coffee shop, what was a quiet and relaxed atmosphere quickly turned sour at the mention of the portrayal of the Prophet and the Virgin Mary in animal images. "People here in Egypt just couldn't believe it happened, even when they saw it in print," said Taha Ibrahim, a civil servant. "We want vigorous measures to be taken; the way everyone has gone quiet on this is something we, Muslims, should be embarrassed about," said another customer Ahmed Abdel-Fattah. "We want to mobilise action and arrange protests against Zionist aggression towards Islam and Christianity. This is a deliberate act to show their disrespect towards us," added Youssef Bedeir.

Gawhara Abdel-Aziz, a housewife from Bulaq, insisted that Muslims were just as outraged as Christians about the "disgusting" representation of the Virgin Mary since she is also revered in Islam. "What they have done is an act of blasphemy," she said.

Dialogue for a US-Egypt FTA

A proposal for the establishment of a free trade zone between Egypt and the United States will require time and additional negotiations before it sees the light. Hoda Tawfik reports from Washington

An Egyptian delegation visiting Washington held talks with US officials this week on increasing the volume of Egyptian exports to the United States to reduce a staggering trade imbalance. This was deemed by officials on both sides as a necessary step before a proposal for establishing an Egyptian-US free trade zone can become a reality.

The Egyptian delegation, which included a large number of businessmen, was led by Finance Minister Mohieddin El-Gharib and Trade Minister Ahmed Gweili. Their talks in Washington fell within the framework of the Egypt-US partnership agreement

Gweili told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the Americans praised the progress achieved by Egypt in reforming its economy. "We agreed to continue the dialogue on the steps that need to be taken for the establishment of a free trade zone," he said. These include increasing the quota of Egyptian textile exports to the US as well as American technical assistance to upgrade the Egyptian customs system, he said.

"The talks have been successful, both politically and economically," an official said.

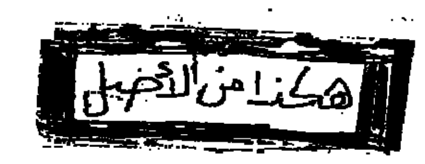
El-Gharib explained to the Americans the Egyptian privatisation programme and the efforts being made to upgrade the capital market, liberalise trade and reduce customs in order to boost Egypt's competitive edge on world markets.

The Americans argued that Egypt, "after re-arranging its economic backyard faces the challenge of attracting foreign investments." On this subject, an agreement was reached on formulating a clear economic strategy with the aim of luring additional investments, particularly from the United States.

Another agreement was reached on providing Egyptian "administrative cadres," including customs, harbours, taxation and sales officials, with training in the United States. Egyptian small and medium industries will also get additional support.

As to the proposed free trade zone, it became clear that this ambitious project requires more time and more negotiation. The barriers that face Egyptian exports to the United States will have to be removed and the quality of Egyptian exports will have to be upgraded.

Egyptian exports, mostly textiles and petroleum, amount to a modest 600 million dollars annually, while imports from the United States are a staggering 3.1 billion dollars. This large gap will have to be narrowed before progress toward the establishment of a free trade zone can be made.



ng for
ty net

finally alarmed by a wave ... is acting to solve the prob... farmers facing the threat of ... El-Din reports



'It's about our very livelihood'

Tenant farmers in Minya Governorate have vowed to continue their struggle to repeal the new landlord-tenant law. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** listened to their grievances



On 1 July, Hussein Abu Shamia, a 64-year-old landlord in El-Tawfikiya village, about 350km south of Cairo, stood before a gathering of tenant farmers and shouted: "I will turn you into slaves again when I take back my land." A few minutes later, pandemonium broke loose.

Around 400 farmers stoned Abu Shamia's house and set fire to the local agricultural cooperative. In a subsequent clash with police, who were rushed to the area to quell the disturbances, three people were killed, including a woman and a 14-year-old boy.

Governor Mansour El-Essawi visited the village in an attempt to defuse the tension, but tempers continued to simmer.

"What the authorities don't understand is that this is not a war over land or wealth. It is about our very livelihood, our survival," said Hassan Abu Shousha, a village resident who was shot and injured in the riots.

The cultivated land adjoining El-Tawfikiya amounts to 1,500 feddans, two thirds of which are rented to tenant farmers.

A security source blamed the eruption of violence on "elements that want to destabilise the situation and take advantage of the farmers' discontent." The source told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that violent protests would not deter the authorities from implementing the law.

Village residents complain that they are being intimidated and harrassed by the security forces. Their presence is never far away — an armoured vehicle patrols the village's unpaved streets every two hours.

"We don't sleep in our houses anymore, we prefer to stay in the fields all night," one villager said.

Local opposition party figures have warned that violence could recur unless the law was quashed or the October deadline for its full implementation extended.

"The implementation of the law at this critical period would plunge the area into a deeper crisis, and one wouldn't be able to predict the consequences," said a professor at Minya University, who asked that his name be withheld.

He said that the government should have acted during the five-year grace period to work out a new framework for the relationship between tenant farmers and landowners, offering farmers loans to enable them to buy the land. "The law as it stands does not provide the necessary framework to ensure that political and economic stability would be maintained after its implementation," the professor said.

Some village residents suggested that the grace period be extended for five more years; others favoured a new law making it possible for tenants to share the land with its owners.

"Let the landlord take 60 per cent of the land and the tenant the rest," said Yehia Yassin Saleh, a villager from Malawi. "You simply cannot ask the farmers to abandon the land which they have been cultivating for half a century. We perfectly understand that landlords have a divine right to take back their land, but the tenant farmers have an equally God-given right to a share in the land which they have farmed for the past 50 years."

Local officials of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) denied that the situation is as serious as some have made out. Mustafa Amer, head of the NDP office in Samallout and a landlord with 800 feddans, described the law as "the best thing that has happened in years. It is only fair that landowners regain their land after this long period; it corrects a fatal mistake," he said.

Governor Essawi has established local 'conciliation committees', which include security and administration officials and members of parliament, to sit down with both tenant farmers and landowners and try and reach mutually acceptable agreements.

"If we can persuade a landowner to accept a rent of 100 or 200 pounds less than the market price, then we are taking a step in the right direction, because people have to understand that the law will be enforced whether they like it or not," Amer said.

An activist from the Land Centre for Human Rights took a different view. He said that government officials endlessly repeated their assurances that farmers would not be affected by the law "as if their words could change the reality of thousands of villagers falling prey to the [law's] consequences."



photos: Khaled El-Fiqi

Survival at stake: Hassana, 54, a Minya tenant-farmer, has been served an eviction notice

A long hot summer?

Police are blaming riots by tenant farmers in two Beni Suef villages on the Islamist-oriented Labour Party. **Jailan Halawi** visits the scene

Tenant farmers, rioting on 24 June in a village in the governorate of Beni Suef, about 120km south of Cairo, burned down an agricultural cooperative, where tenancy contracts and ownership documents are kept. In a neighbouring village, farmers staged demonstrations on the following day to protest against the implementation of the five-year old tenant-landlord relationship law.

Police blamed the riots in the villages of Saft El-Orafa and Manshiyet El-Sadat, about 40km from the provincial capital of Beni Suef, on members of Ibrahim Shukri's Islamist-oriented Labour Party. According to police Capt. Hamdi Farag, about 25 party members walked around the village of Saft El-Orafa during the afternoon of 24 June, using megaphones to urge tenant farmers to destroy the local cooperative.

"Beware, the government will take away your tenancy contracts to deprive you of your land," the party members shouted to the farmers. "Fight for your rights and do not be afraid. The life-span of tyranny is short, compared to the life-span of justice."

According to the police, the party members managed to gather about 2,000 villagers, who first ripped out telephone lines to prevent any call for help to the nearest police station at El-Fashn, and then set the cooperative alight. About 15 minutes later, police forces arrived from Beni Suef but, by then, the cooperative had been gutted by the fire. Nobody was injured.

Ten days later, scattered files littered the floor in the burnt-out cooperative building. Filing cabinets had been scorched black and the pungent smell of fertilisers hung in the air. The streets of the village were deserted, with its inhabitants preferring to stay in the safety of their homes. Even the few villagers who ventured outside refused to speak to visitors.

Maj. Gen Mahmoud Ramzi, assistant security chief of Beni Suef, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that police had advance information that members of the Labour Party would try to incite tenant riots in the hope that the full enforcement of the tenant-landlord relationship law, scheduled for October, would be delayed. "Knowing the peaceful nature of peasants, we did not wish to interfere and frighten them," he said. But the Labour Party "took advantage of their naive nature and their attachment to the land to spread misleading information about the law," Ramzi added.

"Had the representatives of the National Democratic Party [NDP] thoroughly explained the law to tenants earlier, it would have saved the peasants from becoming easy prey to the Labour Party," he said.

After the riot, security officials and NDP representatives held several meetings with landlords and tenants "and everything is now under control," Ramzi said.

"I do not believe that Labour Party members really care about the peasants, otherwise, they would not have encouraged them to burn and destroy property and get arrested," Capt. Farag added. He said that a few days before the attack, Labour members toured the village, assuring peasants they had money to support them in case they got arrested.

Shaaban Ramadan, a supervisor at the cooperative, said he ran away, fearing for his life, as the rioting tenant farmers approached. The aim of the attack, he added, was to destroy all tenancy and ownership documents kept inside. "Tenants worrying about their future and livelihood got carried away," he said.

What added to their worries was a visit to the cooperative by court emissaries, who arrived to warn the villagers that the October deadline was approaching. "The peasants mistakenly thought that those emissaries were there to take away their tenancy contracts. This aroused them further," Ramadan said.

Abdel-Fattah Ahmed Mohamed, manager of the cooperative, said the peasants emerged as the losers from the attack because it destroyed their fertilisers. "We never thought the peasants would act against their own interests," he said.

Five kilometres from Saft El-Orafa lies Manshiyet El-Sadat where an anti-law demonstration was held on 25 June. But police were on the alert this time and the gathering was dispersed quickly.

"Although the Labour representatives aimed at spreading violence throughout the villages of Beni Suef, we did not give them the chance this time to undermine the interests of peasants," Ramzi said.

Sixty-five people were rounded up from the two villages, and 29 of them were remanded in custody. They include two high Labour Party officials: Mohsen Hashem, secretary for peasant affairs, and Zaki Shaarawi, the local secretary in El-Fashn.

According to State Security Prosecutor Hisham Saraya, the two could be held in custody for up to four consecutive periods of 15 days each before they are put on trial on charges of inciting riots.

photo: Saad Fag El-Nour

Burning issues: outraged tenants set fire to the agriculture cooperative in their village

Islamists and leftists blast law

All the major parties, except the Wafd, have come out against the law. **Shaden Shehab** reviews their positions

The Islamist-oriented Labour Party has teamed up with the leftist Tagammu and Nasserist parties in the campaign against the landlord-tenant law. Opposition efforts on behalf of tenants led to the arrest of journalist Hamdein Sabbahi and three other leftists on 17 June. The three were charged with "resorting to terrorism to oppose a state law," inciting tenant farmers and disturbing the peace. Two officials of the Labour Party were later arrested in the Governorate of Beni Suef and face charges of incitement to riot.

The Labour Party, in a statement, denied the charge and said it has been working to "rationalise the peasants' actions with the aim of safeguarding the security of Egypt."

Officials from the three parties met on Sunday and sent a memorandum to the president's office, suggesting alternative means of regulating the tenant-landlord relationship. The memorandum said the government's decision to establish local 'conciliation committees' to work out mutually acceptable arrangements was not adequate.

Labour's position surprised many observers, who had expected the party to support the law because it is in accordance with the long-established position of the party's major political ally, the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood. For many years the Brotherhood has been among the most virulent opponents of Nasserist land reform on the grounds that it ran counter to Islamic *shari'a* by violating the sanctity of private property. Labour's secretary-general, Abdel-Hamid Barakat, offered an explanation. "It is in accordance with Islam to ward off any impending harm, and harm will happen on 30 September," he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*." This is the date when the five-year grace period ends and full implementation of the law begins. "We have not deviated from our Islamic programme. On the contrary, we are implementing it," added Barakat.

Under a scenario proposed by Labour, landlords who intended to farm the land themselves should be allowed to retake possession. But if they plan to sell or rent it, priority should be given to the existing tenant farmer, who should be provided with government loans enabling him to buy or re-rent the land, Barakat said.

The Tagammu Party, in a statement, suggested that the October deadline be ignored and the current lease arrangements maintained. It also proposed that the rent be reviewed every three years in light of the revenue accruing from the land, and recommended the establishment of a fund to help tenant farmers purchase the land in instalments to be paid over 20 years. The party also suggested that alternative plots of land in the newly-reclaimed areas be offered to farmers who faced eviction by landlords wishing to cultivate the land themselves.

The Nasserist Party, which upholds the principles of the 1952 Revolution, commented in a statement: "It is naive to think that the [opposition] parties or any other forces are inciting the peasants. Reality and history affirm that peasants do not give away their rights but defend them strongly."

On the other hand, the liberal Wafd Party, a traditional opponent of the 1952 Revolution, supported the law. "After 45 years of injustice, the law is restoring the rights of landowners," commented party spokesman and member of parliament Yassin Serageddin. Other parties, he added, "should not play one group of people against another. This is not to Egypt's benefit."

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

Landlords have their day

Many absentee landlords are looking forward to the day when they can take full control of their land. **Rehab Saad** interviewed three of them

Many absentee landlords believe that the liberalisation of land rents, when the 1992 landlord-tenant law takes full effect in October, will restore rights which were "usurped" 45 years ago. Landlords interviewed by *Al-Ahram Weekly* complained that the 1952 agrarian reform law left them unable to do as they pleased with their land, even though they owned it, and that they were paid peanuts as rent. They could not even sell the land, unless they shared the profit from the sale with the tenant, usually on a 50-50 basis. If they refused such a deal, the tenant would refuse to vacate the land.

"I rented out my land a long time before the 1952 Revolution," said Saad El-Domiati, a lawyer who owns five feddans in the Beheira Governorate in the western Nile Delta. "I rented out the land because I am not a peasant and my job was in Cairo. At the time, the relationship between the two sides was regulated by a contract which gave the owner the right to determine both the amount of rent and the duration of the lease. Both could be changed from time to time."

But with the agrarian reform law, the government intervened in the relationship between landlord and tenant, El-Domiati said. The 1952 law made land leases open-ended and fixed the rental value at seven times the amount of the land tax. "Even worse, the law gave tenants the right to bequeath the rented land to their offspring," he added.

He hopes the new law will restore owners' rights. "It is not logical to rent a feddan of land worth LE50,000, and from which the tenant gains a lot of money, for an annual LE500," El-Domiati said.

Talaat Maher, who lives in Alexandria and owns 37 feddans of land in the Nile Delta province of Menoufiya, said the previous law was biased towards the tenant. "My tenants paid me peanuts even though they earned thousands of pounds a year," he said. "Some of them even bought pieces of land in other areas with the money they made from my land."

Sami El-Munayyer, who lives in Cairo and owns 12 feddans of land in the Nile Delta province of Daqahliya along with his brothers, said: "Even if we wanted to sell a part of our land, we had to share the profit from the sale with the tenant. My eight brothers and I would share one half of the price and the tenant would take the other half. This is injustice."

Small landlords fared even worse, according to El-Munayyer: "A widow who owned a feddan or two, for example, and wanted to sell, was obliged to share the profit with the tenant, even though she badly needed the money."

Tenants' rights to bequeath tenancies to their children has been the cause of yet further problems for landlords. "Before the revolution, we had just one tenant, but now, after all these years, 82 people hold tenancies on our land," said El-Munayyer. "They include doctors, civil servants, lawyers and others who have nothing to do with agriculture and who are getting other people to cultivate *the land*."

In the landlords' opinion, the new law is fair to tenants because it gave them a five-year grace period to re-adjust to the new circumstances. "The law also states that if the landlord wants to sell his land, the tenant has priority, so it is not biased against them," explained El-Munayyer.

El-Domiati is seriously thinking of selling his land once the law takes full effect in October. "We are not peasants. We could invest the money in something else that we know about," he commented.

Maher said he would try the new rental procedures first and see whether it works. "If it doesn't, I think that selling the land would be the appropriate solution. Some tenants are ready to buy on an immediate basis."

'Get the settlers out'

Removing extremist Jewish settlers from Hebron may be the only way to stop the renewed Palestinian Intifada in the turbulent city, **Graham Usher** reports



Israeli soldiers guard a Hebron street as a nun passes through the troubled area *(photo: AFP)*

For the last three weeks, Palestinians and Israeli soldiers have been engaged in a lethal struggle for the future of Hebron, fought out along an invisible front-line of alleyways and arched rooftops that now separate the "Palestinian" and "Israeli" parts of the city. If the geography of the conflict is new, the rules are as old as the Intifada.

Palestinians — most of them in their early teens — take on the region's mightiest army with stones, Molotov cocktails and home-made pipe bombs. Behind a screen of smoke billowing out from burning tyres, they run their wounded to a Red Crescent ambulance, permanently stationed in Hebron's main square. The soldiers — with sun visors and bullet-proof jackets — squat behind cement blocks or on roofs. Through telescopic sights, they pick off their victims with metal-coated rubber bullets or, when the "*shabab*", or Palestinian youth, get too close, with live ammunition.

The imbalance in arms is reflected in the disparity of casualties. Since 14 June — when Hebron's Palestinians took to the streets to protest against the US Congress's decision to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's "united" capital — at least 350 Palestinians have been injured, 35 seriously, with around half of the wounded under the age of 18. Over the same period, about a dozen Israeli soldiers and border police have been hurt, one seriously.

Asked to explain the cause of the protests, Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) member for Hebron, Rafiq Natshe, is mordant. "The occupation," he snaps.

Under the Hebron agreement, the PLO sanctioned a reality where Hebron's religious and commercial centre (and 20,000 Palestinians) is ruled by the Israeli army to protect the lives of some 400 Jewish settlers and Yesheva students who have squatted in their midst. "We warned that Hebron's residents would not tolerate this arrangement for long," says Natshe.

Less than six months after the agreement was signed, Palestinians in Hebron have made that prophecy a reality. The conflict in the city is about neither the new settlement being built at Jebel Abu Ghneim nor the US Congress, they say. It is about the unworkability of the Hebron protocol. But it has been stirred by the actions of the settlers.

The latest action was the distribution in Hebron of a poster depicting the Prophet Mohamed as a pig writing in a book marked "Qur'an". Israeli politicians were swift to denounce and dismiss the sacrilege as the work of an "idiot". In this case, a 26-year-old Israeli woman, Tatiana Susskind, by her own admission, said she drew the poster because she wanted to ignite "a holy war". Palestinians, however, believe the cause goes deeper than the mind of one individual.

"It is the outcome of the culture and education among the settlers in Hebron," says Nyaf Rajoub, an Islamist sheikh from the nearby village of Dura. Nor is the culture confined to the settlers. On 2 July, Israeli soldiers commandeered a Palestinian school that sits on the edge of the front-line. When the soldiers left the school three days later, teachers found pages of the Qur'an ripped apart, as well as copies of the poster. Ever since the clashes started last April, Palestinians have reported a steady rise in anti-Islamic insults on the part of both settlers and soldiers in Hebron.

The feeling among Palestinians is that the settlers and elements of the army want a conflagration in Hebron to prepare the ground for its re-occupation. It is a strategy that may backfire. Spurred on by calls from Hebron's nationalist and Islamic leaders to protest "by all means", for most of last week Palestinians confronted the Israeli soldiers with stones and Molotovs rather than more lethal weaponry. Combined with the absence of any attempt by the Palestinian police to hold back the protesters, the resort to Intifada-like tactics preserved a unity in action between activists belonging to the PLO's Fatah faction and those aligned with the Islamist movement, Hamas. "While the Islamist movement criticises the Palestinian Authority for accepting the Hebron agreement, we will not allow this criticism to degenerate into intra-Palestinian fighting," says Nyaf Rajoub.

It is a wise posture. Images of stone-throwing youths taking on the Israeli army has again re-opened the debate in Israel over the future of the settler enclave in Hebron. On 5 July, some 4,000 Palestinians from inside Israel marched in Nazareth to protest the poster as a desecration of Islam. Speakers from Hadash, the United Arab List and the Islamic movement called on the Israeli government to evict the settlers from Hebron. More significantly, two Labour Party MPs — Binyamin Ben-Eliezer and Uzi Baram — also said the government should "consider" evacuating the settlers from Hebron. Baram — who polled the highest vote last year in Labour internal elections and is close to the new Labour leader, Ehud Barak — commented that the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin erred by not removing the settlers after the Ibrahimi Mosque massacre in Hebron in 1994.

The evacuation of the settlers from the heart of Hebron has long been the consensus among Palestinians and, with the collapse of the Hebron agreement, is a growing consensus among Israelis. The question is how many massacres and confrontations will it take before it becomes the policy of an Israeli government.

All the president's men

The nomination of US ambassador to Israel, Martin Indyk, to the highest State Department post on the Middle East caused consternation in Arab circles. **Lamis Andoni** reports from Washington

The departure of the incumbent Assistant Secretary of State for Near East affairs, Robert Pelletreau, and the selection of Indyk signals what some Arab-American analysts see as the end of a generation of "Arabists" at the State Department.

Short of last-minute surprises, analysts in Washington expect Indyk to be easily confirmed for the post by the predominantly pro-Israeli Congress.

David Welsh, acting assistant secretary of state for Near East Affairs, has said that the US Middle East policy following Indyk's appointment will focus on the peace process, Israeli security, regional cooperation and the containment of Iraq, Iran and Libya.

Welch, a former diplomat at the US Embassy in Amman, told a meeting at the National Association of Arab Americans (NAAA) that he did not foresee a shift in American policy in the next three years.

His remarks were interpreted by Arab American leaders to mean that Arabs should not expect any dramatic American initiative to put pressure on Israel to further the implementation of the Palestinian-Israeli accords.

Over the last few years, special Middle East coordinator Dennis Ross has been the leading US official involved in the Arab-Israeli negotiations. Indyk, a former pro-Israeli lobbyist, is expected to try to push for a more assertive role for his department in the peace process, but this is unlikely to produce any changes in US foreign policy in the Middle East.

The appointment of Indyk is consistent with a pro-Israeli foreign policy that has been one of the traits of President Bill Clinton's administration since he first came to office in 1993. This is why it has provoked resentment in the Arab world.

"We are witnessing a complete Zionist takeover of US foreign policy. The role of the Arabists is over," said Nasseer Aruri of the National Association of Arab Americans, referring to the departure of Pelletreau, who is seen as an Arabist because of his long record of service in many Arab countries and because he was not known to be an advocate of Israeli interests.

The fact that Indyk is Jewish has been particularly remarked upon in the Arab press. It is true that Jewish Americans have made unprecedented ascension to powerful posts in the Clinton administration, but many analysts refute the argument of a Jewish takeover of the White House.

"The main issue is the American administration's foreign policy. Pro-Israeli officials, Jews and non-Jews, are the ones getting appointed in sensitive posts", Aruri, who has written extensively on American foreign policy, said.

American Jews who are critical of Israel and American foreign policy, meanwhile, now feel more alienated than ever. Outspoken critics like prominent American-Jewish thinker Noam Chomsky, theologist Mark Ellis and political economist Sarah Roy say that they are being marginalised by the mainstream media and shunned by the establishment.

The Israeli press, on the other hand, was among the first to boast that Jews are controlling key posts in Washington. Israel's prestigious daily, *Maariv*, ran a headline about "The Jews who run Clinton's court." This was followed by a report on the number and the influence of Jewish staffers in the American government. The report did not point out that the Jews and Jewish organisations that question Israeli policies have no real representation in the American government.

Furthermore, even supporters of the Israeli Peace Now group in the US, who have supported Clinton during his election campaigns, feel alienated by Washington's reluctance to take a tough stand vis-à-vis the Likud government.

Indyk acquired the American citizenship only a few months before he was first appointed to the post of National Security Adviser on Near Easter Affairs in 1994. Originally an Australian, Indyk has a long history of supporting Israel. In 1973, he was a student in Israel and refused to be evacuated with other Westerners during the October war. He later re-emerged as a scholar and high profile official at the American-Israeli Political Action Committee (AIPAC), the strongest pro-Israeli lobby in Washington. In the early nineties he was appointed director of the Washington Institute for Near East Affairs, an influential pro-Israeli think tank.

During the Washington rounds of the Israeli-Arab talks between 1991-1993, Indyk's briefing and press statements were instrumental in setting the stage for the Israeli negotiating position. His views were not very different from the Likud Party.

Indyk's writings argued for a stronger Israel, that the Palestinians should not dictate any terms but accept whatever Israel offers them and strongly supported the controversial US policy of containment of Iran and Iraq.

Following his appointment as US ambassador to Israel, however, Indyk distanced himself from the more hardline Israeli positions, incurring the wrath of some extremist Israeli groups and, at one time, the criticism of the World Zionist Organisation.

According to Khalil Jahshan, NAAA president, the US administration could afford to make such an appointment because it takes the Arab governments for granted. "The real problem is that the Arab world does not take a stand. The Arab world is always willing to accommodate the American administration and acts cowardly," Jahshan said.

Another analyst, who is close to the State Department, said that American officials are used to the "noises" that Arab officials make and which hardly reflect a stand or a policy.

According to Aruri and Jahshan, the appointment of Indyk and other pro-Israeli officials is only a symptom of the real problem, which is that the US policy does not take into account Arab interests and aspirations.

'Bread or opium', warn the masses

Thousands of Lebanese took part in "the revolution of the hungry" to protest their deteriorating living conditions. **Zeina Khodr** reports from Baalbeck



Lebanese children raise loaves of bread during a protest rally held in the impoverished Bekaa valley *(photo: Reuters)*

The "revolution of the hungry" was launched early this week from Baalbeck's main city square in Lebanon's eastern Bekaa Valley in response to the exhortations by former Hizbullah leader Sheikh Subhi Tufeyli.

Between 10,000 and 15,000 people chanted and shouted slogans in support of Tufeyli's call for a campaign of civil disobedience aimed at putting pressure on the government of Prime Minister Rafiq Al-Hariri to address seriously the growing socio-economic problems facing the residents of remote rural areas. Despite a heavy army presence, no violence was reported and the march ended peacefully.

Many Lebanese analysts regard Tufeyli's campaign as political and aimed against the state and particularly against Hizbullah. "Tufeyli is challenging the government. He is also challenging the leadership of Hizbullah since he launched his campaign in Baalbeck which is a Hizbullah stronghold," said one analyst.

Tufeyli, who served as Hizbullah's secretary-general in the 1980s, broke away from the movement in 1992 allegedly because it was not radical enough and had entered mainstream Lebanese politics. Following the signing of the 1990 Taif agreement which ended Lebanon's 15-year civil war, Hizbullah agreed to take part in general elections and has maintained since then several deputies in parliament.

Tufeyli's campaign did not receive the support of the official Hizbullah leadership, nor of deputies representing the Bekaa in parliament.

Only days before the planned protest was to be held, the government, in a clear attempt to undercut the growing support for Tufeyli, allocated 115 billion Lebanese pounds ($97 million) for development projects in rural areas such as the Bekaa Valley and Akkar in north Lebanon.

Hariri's cabinet also decided to speed up construction of a dam on the Orontes River which would irrigate 6,000 hectares in the Hermel and Qaa regions of the Bekaa valley. The government also promised to start negotiations with the World Bank to provide an annual $60 million loan for rural development.

Tufeyli, however, dismissed the financial pledge and questioned the government's seriousness in addressing the region's economic grievances. "It is a positive step if the government is serious and not just trying to silence me," Tufeyli said. "So far, the government's policies are wrong. It is increasing taxes... and the people do not have any choice but to die of hunger."

Addressing the crowd in Baalbeck, Tufeyli called on the people to press ahead with civil disobedience. "Patience has its limits. The authorities have closed the door in your faces and they have turned the country into a desert. You should stop paying taxes and water and electricity bills."

The former Hizbullah chief reiterated his threat to spread his campaign across Lebanon if the government fails to meet his demands. He said he would lead a march to Beirut with his supporters and besiege the residences of the country's leaders if they continue to ignore his demands. He also accused Hariri of "stealing the country's wealth and impoverishing the people while spending billions of dollars on a reconstruction plan in Beirut alone."

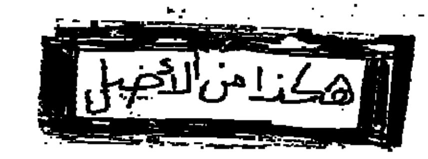
During the demonstration, protesters held up pieces of bread to symbolise the shortage of food. They also chanted anti-government slogans. "Down with the government. Death to Hariri."

Following the government's crack-down on the cultivation of illegal drugs three years ago, the Bekaa Valley has suffered greatly from the loss of a resource that generated millions of dollars during the war years. In 1994, the United Nations adopted a plan to allocate $4.2 billion to phase out drug plantations and provide alternative crops. But farmers and residents are now threatening to start replanting hashish and opium since the government has failed to support profitable alternative crops.

According to Tufeyli, it is the government's policies that are forcing farmers to plant drugs in order to earn a living. "This is what we are trying to avoid. The people are in despair and we are pointing out their rights," he said.

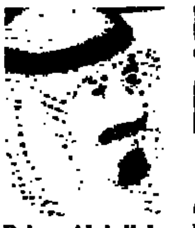
After the hunger revolt, Prime Minister Rafiq Al-Hariri met House Speaker Nabih Berri. Following the meeting, Berri told reporters they had discussed the hunger revolt in Bekaa and they both agreed on the necessity to move quickly to meet the wishes of the people there and in other deprived areas.

A recent United Nations Development Programme study found that the Bekaa region has historically been neglected and is among the least developed region in Lebanon. It has a poor infrastructure, little access to potable water, inadequate social and health services and the highest illiteracy rate in the country.



Thaw in Saudi-Iranian ties

Following a rare visit by a senior Saudi official to Tehran last week, the two countries expressed a desire to improve bilateral ties. **Rasha Saad** looks into the implications of the visit


Prince Abdullah


Khatami

An envoy of Saudi Arabia's King Fahd arrived in Tehran last week and delivered a message to outgoing Iranian President Ali Hashemi Rafsanjani that dealt with ways and means of expanding bilateral relations, officials said.

The visit by Saudi Arabia's Minister of State Abdul-Aziz bin Abdullah Al-Khowiter was the latest in a series of goodwill gestures exchanged between the two countries over the past few months at a time when the United States has increased its pressure on Tehran and claimed that it is a major threat to security in the oil-rich Gulf region.

According to Saudi diplomats, the rare visit by the Saudi official to Tehran is a sign of a thaw in the icy ties between the two regional powers. Cooperation between the two countries is seen as vital for the stability of the region where more than two thirds of the world's oil reserves are located.

In order to drive home the point that Saudi Arabia is willing to improve ties with Tehran, Al-Khowiter told Rafsanjani that his country would be represented "at the highest level" in the upcoming summit of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) due to be held in Tehran in December.

Relations started to deteriorate between the two countries after Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution. Riyadh and other Arab countries accused Iran of seeking to export its radical Islamic revolution. Iran, meanwhile, accused the Saudis of threatening its security by tolerating the military presence of US troops on its soil, particularly after the 1991 Gulf War.

The annual Mecca pilgrimage season also has been a reason behind continuing tension between the two countries. In 1987, 402 Iranian pilgrims died when Saudi police suppressed their annual demonstration in which they denounced the United States and Israel. Following this incident, diplomatic ties were severed for more than three years.

However, the presence of 22,000 American troops in the region since US-led troops liberated Kuwait from Iraqi occupation has changed the rules of the game.

Tehran recognises that any threat to the security of the Gulf states would be deterred immediately by the United States. On the other hand, says Hassan Abu Taleb, an expert at Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries are fully aware, maybe more than the Americans, that any clash with Tehran would result in long-term dire consequences for the whole region.

Iran has a strong presence in nearly all Gulf countries, with many of its nationals settling in these countries and practising trade and other business. A military confrontation between Iran and the United States, supported by the Gulf countries, would lead to internal disturbances in those countries and cause great damage to their oil exports and economies.

The recent election of moderate Iranian President Mohamed Khatami, the present stalemate in the Arab-Israeli peace process and the growing ties between Turkey and Israel — both arch-enemies of Tehran — are all factors which observers believe have led to the improvement of ties between Iran and its neighbours.

According to Arab observers, Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Abdullah is known for his pro-Arab policies and his desire to build stronger relations with Iran based on mutual respect. Abdullah also believes that Saudi Arabia should maintain an independent foreign policy despite its close links with the United States.

Earlier this month, Saudi Arabia and Iran joined forces to put pressure on other oil-producing states in the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to remain committed to their quotas in order to avoid further deterioration in oil prices.

More importantly, Saudi Arabia has been very cautious in dealing with US media reports claiming that Iran was behind the 1996 bombing of Al-Khobar complex in which 19 US servicemen were killed. Saudi officials refused to confirm the US reports and stated that investigations were still going on. Iran's state-run media praised Riyadh for its position on the Khobar bombing.

Saudi Arabia is not the only Arab country seeking to improve its ties with Iran. Syria, nearly the only Arab country which maintained strong links with Iran after the late Ayatollah Khomeini's revolution, has been working hard to bring Arab countries and Iran closer.

Egypt, which has long complained of Iranian backing of Islamist militant groups leading a campaign of violence at home, has also announced recently that an Iranian business delegation will visit Cairo in order to boost economic cooperation.

Even the United Arab Emirates, which is involved in a dispute with Iran over the ownership of three Gulf islands, has expressed a desire to improve ties with Iran and avoid tension in the region.

Iraq, which fought a long, bitter war against Iran, said it will also send a high-level delegation to Tehran's OIC summit. Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Velayati delivered an invitation to Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, although it was not expected that the Iraqi leader would personally take part.

Commenting on the reason behind Iran's attempts to improve its relations with the Arab countries, Mohamed Abdel-Mo'men, a professor at Cairo's Ain Shams University and expert on Iranian affairs, explained that Iran is passing through what he called "the phase of the Islamic *civilisation*". *According to Abdel-Mo'men, the* Iranian revolution has passed through three stages since 1979, and what the present leadership is seeking to do now is portray itself as a model for a modern Islamic state.

The first stage of Iran's revolution, Abdel-Mo'men said, lasted until the death of Ayatollah Khomeini. That stage was characterised by its revolutionary line. The second, he believes, took place during the presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani, who has been concerned with the rebuilding of the country's infrastructure and the "building up of the Iranian society", particularly following the devastating war with Iraq.

"Iran is finishing with the second stage and is now heading towards joining the Asian tigers [the third stage]. It aims at development through contacting and cooperating with all parties that have economic power, including the Arab world," Abdel-Mo'men stated. This is the policy that has influenced Iran's latest foreign policy shifts. Thus, Iran is now trying to create mutual understanding and avoid any tension with the Arabs.

As evidence of this, Abdel-Mo'men cited the change in the attitude of the Iranian pilgrims in recent years, and Iran's suggestion to open a dialogue with the United Arab Emirates to solve the problem of the three disputed Gulf islands.

Iraqis' lot

The appointment of a new UN commissioner to monitor the destruction of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction does not indicate a change in the policy of the US-dominated body towards Baghdad, writes **Hussein Al-Qassimi**

Rolf Ekeus, in a series of interviews he gave before he left his post as chairman of the United Nations' Special Commission on the destruction of Iraq's lethal weapons systems (UNISCOM) last month, not only accused the Iraqi government of stonewalling his commission's effort for more than six years, but also of continuing to hold some of its "illegal" weapons.

The remarks can be read as Ekeus' final verdict before he left his unfinished job of dismantling Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, a task he initially thought would take him only a few months to complete.

Ekeus' statements are probably viewed with satisfaction by the Security Council, and especially the United States, which has been aggressively championing the commission's efforts since they were launched following the 1991 Gulf War. But these statements must have been alarming to Baghdad, which was certainly hoping for a better farewell token from UNISCOM'S chairman.

No one expected Ekeus to give Iraq a clean slate on its ballistic, nuclear, biological and chemical arsenals before he left his post to become Sweden's ambassador to Washington. But Ekeus' testimony is likely to be seen by the Iraqis as a last-minute attempt to set the rules for his successor, Australia's delegate to the UN Richard Butler.

In the wake of Ekeus' judgment, the question is not only why he did not leave with the kind of conciliatory gesture that many observers believe would have encouraged the Iraqis to cooperate more with the commission's efforts. More important is whether the inspection and destruction of whatever remains of the weapons can go smoothly and be finished within a reasonable time span.

Iraq and the United Nations have always differed on the scope of the inspectors' mandate. The major problem between Iraq and Ekeus has been a lack of trust. Iraq strongly believed that Ekeus and his team had a hidden agenda. Meanwhile, the UN chief inspector always maintained that the Iraqis had turned the process into a game of cat and mouse, that was like what Ekeus called "Tales of the One Thousand and One Arabian Nights, where they tell a different story every night".

So what will happen with Butler? The West is already urging the Australian diplomat to show the same combativeness his predecessor displayed. The inspectors must certify that Iraq has complied with the Security *Council's orders to scrap* all non-conventional weapons programmes and dismantle long-range missiles. Only then will the Security Council lift the crippling economic sanctions imposed after Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990. Meanwhile, Iraq has made it clear that while it will continue cooperating with UNISCOM, it will not compromise on matters it sees as harmful to its national security or sovereignty. Thus it seems that the vicious cycle of accusations and mistrust will continue.

Of course it is Iraqi civilians who will continue to pay a heavy price for the policies of their regime. The UN-imposed sanctions have caused untold misery for millions of Iraqis. Some $100-140 billion in potential oil revenue has been lost. Thousands of children, sick people and the elderly have died. The once flourishing industrial, agricultural and trade sectors have ground to a virtual standstill. The nation's renowned school system, which produced generations of well-educated and cultured Iraqis, is now in ruins. Indeed, the future of Iraq and its people are in grave danger due to ever-increasing lost opportunities.

Nothing indicates that a solution to this predicament is near. As there is no time limit on the completion of UNISCOM's mission, the process for the Iraqi government now seems never-ending, uncompromising and unrewarding. Such a perception invites more confrontations and more troubles.

Obviously, the Security Council is not willing to compromise. For six years its message has been clear: Iraq must give up once and for all its capabilities and ambitions to retain or acquire weapons of mass destruction. Even "friendly" member states like France, Russia and China, who have been lured into occasional conciliatory positions by the prospect of lucrative oil deals, have not been willing to support Iraq's claim that its weapons have already been destroyed.

Instead, after another of the many confrontations between Iraq and the UN inspectors, France, Russia and China joined the rest of the Council's members last month in issuing a resolution that suspended the 60-day sanctions review and threatened new measures unless the inspectors certify Iraqi cooperation when they file their next progress report on 11 October. The fact that these three countries refused to block the US-sponsored resolution suggests that Baghdad has a long way to go before it can look forward to the lifting of the sanctions.

For this and other reasons, Iraq's relations with the United Nations will most certainly remain confrontational and explosive, even with the departure of Ekeus. Indeed, the future prospects of the crisis appear no less ominous today than they did six years ago when the inspectors started their efforts to destroy Iraq's military might.

This is surely worrisome for many parties, especially Iraq's vulnerable neighbours in the Gulf region, who see such tensions as major threats to their security and stability. Sooner or later, the Gulf countries will find that the American policy of using UN sanctions to contain Iraq has not worked and is unlikely to work in the future. So far, there is no clear alternative policy being considered by Iraq's foes. But the more inconsistencies appear, the more urgent it will become to find a new approach.

What is most important, however, is that the Iraqi people's tragedy will continue. Thousands more Iraqis will die, while the rest will be left to be crushed by economic sanctions that will enter their eighth year next month. Generations of Iraqis will suffer from malnutrition, lack of adequate education, lost opportunities and an uncertain future.

And still we are left wondering: Is there a way to break out of this dilemma?

The writer is an Iraqi journalist based in Cairo.





IMAGES OF SUFFERING: Sanctions have devastated every facet of Iraqis' lives. Lack of sanitation facilities (top) turns Saddam City into "a nightmare of garbage, raw sewage, and pools of infested water," said a UN report, while above, mothers whose children are suffering from leukaemia cannot find medication in a Baghdad hospital

Ekeus' grim farewell

The seven-year-old UN sanctions against Iraq have reduced the life of its people to misery, forcing thousands to flee the country, mainly to Jordan. **Lola Keilani** in Amman reports on the plight of Iraqis immigrants

Despite her two science degrees, Aseel, a 43-year-old Iraqi, works as a maid for a Jordanian family. Her MScs in Physics and Chemistry did not make her fate any different from the estimated 90,000 Iraqis living in Jordan since Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990. Like the majority of her nationals, she has no residency permit and longs for the day she can return to her country.

"Living conditions back home are impossible," Aseel said. She explained that her monthly salary was hardly enough to buy a dozen eggs in Baghdad and that her personal security and safety were an even bigger problem. The increasingly harsh living conditions in Iraq have caused the incidence of burglary and theft to rise sharply over the past seven years and become a major concern for most Iraqis. "My house was robbed twice, and one day while I was driving my car with my family, a young man with a submachine gun stopped us and stole the car."

According to official Jordanian figures, 30,000 Iraqis reside in the Kingdom, as well as many thousands who are there "on a temporary basis." Temporary basis refers to those Iraqis who come to Jordan for transit on their way to other countries, usually the United States, Europe and Australia.

But not all those who are supposedly transiting in Jordan actually depart once their five-months-visa expires, as Jordanian law stipulates. "We have been in Amman for three years now. We applied to immigrate to Australia, but it does not seem that it will work," said Jameelah, who earns $50 working as a secretary for more than 12 hours a day. Neither Jameelah nor her mother and two brothers have residence or work permits.

Muath Abdel-Rahim, member of the politburo of the Amman-based Iraqi opposition Al-Wifaq (reconciliation) Movement agreed that the living conditions of the Iraqis have worsened to unprecedented levels since the UN Security Council imposed economic sanctions on Iraq. He said, however, that the only solution to the present crisis is for the "Iraqi people and the army to work on changing the Iraqi regime in order to bring security and stability back to the country."

Abdel-Rahim alleged, in an interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, that due to the deteriorating living conditions in Iraq which have hit all segments of the society, "security forces have colluded with thieves and thugs, and receive bribes from them to help them escape punishment."

Abdel-Rahim called upon international and regional powers to encourage the Iraqi people to change the present regime of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. "The Iraqi people want change but they face a dictatorship with weapons of mass destruction. Thus, the people need the support of the international and regional community," he stated.

According to other opposition figures, the resumption of Iraqi oil exports in December after the oil-for-food deal was approved by the UN led the Jordanian government to change its policy towards members of the Iraqi opposition functioning in Amman. The oil-for-food deal allows Iraq to sell $2 billion worth of oil every six months upon the approval of the Security Council. This would mean more business deals between Amman and Baghdad and would boost the Jordanian economy.

Jordan, which originally sided with Iraq during the Kuwait crisis, remains the main entrance point for Iraqi imports approved by the UN. Jordan first changed its policy of support for Baghdad after Saddam's two sons-in-law, Hussein and Saddam Kamel, fled to Jordan in 1995 with their wives. At the time, Jordanian authorities allowed the Iraqi opposition to open an office in Amman and to issue statements calling for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein.

Jordan now only grudgingly allows Al-Wifaq Movement to operate and has ordered its members to reduce their activities and limit their movements. A weekly newspaper that was to be published in Amman by the Iraqi opposition was never given a permit. The secretary-general of Al-Wifaq, Ayyad Alawi, and his media consultant, Haroun Mohamed, left Jordan for Europe. Another leading Iraqi opposition figure, Mishaal Al-Jabbouri who heads Al-Watan Party, was denied re-entry into Jordan last month after a two-year stay in the country. And the opposition newspaper is now published in London where the majority of Al-Wifaq leaders are currently residing.

The Iraqi opposition figures living in Amman faced a similar situation last year when Jordan was in the process of negotiating the price and amount of oil Iraq would export to Amman. Noting the increase in the Iraqi opposition's activities in Jordan, Baghdad's government threatened Amman to sell its oil at market rate, breaking an earlier agreement to provide oil to Jordan at a special price. Following negotiations, Baghdad agreed to sell oil to Amman at the price of $19 per barrel while the market price was nearly $22 a barrel. This saved Jordan $300 million.

Other observers of Jordanian-Iraqi relations have blamed former Jordanian Prime Minister Abdel-Karim Kabariti for the deterioration of relations between the two countries. Kabariti's strong and open condemnation of the killing of Saddam's sons-in-law upon their return to Baghdad marked another departure from the cautious policies of previous Jordanian governments towards Baghdad. Kabariti held the Iraqi regime responsible for the killings and described Iraq under the current regime as a country where "there is no freedom or human dignity for citizens."

Thus, King Hussein's recent reshuffle of the government in March, removing Kabariti and appointing Abdel-Salam Al-Majali as prime minister, was well received by the Iraqi government. Tarek Aziz, Iraqi deputy prime minister, told the newly appointed Al-Majali in their first meeting that the previous tension in relations was "artificial" and promised to improve ties.

In the meantime, thousands of Iraqis, like Aseel and Jameelah, will continue to stay away from their homeland, seeking better living conditions abroad and looking forward to the day when their sad plight will end.

Paymaster, taskmaster

At no time in the history of Europe has the continent's security arrangements been so dominated by a non-European power, argues **Gamal Nkrumah**



In Madrid for the NATO Summit, US President Bill Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright pose with their Spanish counterparts *(photo: AFP)*

The security of Eastern Europe has never been the subject of a fiercer debate than during the past two years. America, and America alone, is deciding which countries in eastern Europe are to be permitted to join the expanded NATO.

Many Western European countries want to see former Warsaw Pact states join NATO. France is making a strong pitch for Romania. Italy wants Slovenia in. Germany and the Scandinavian countries favour membership for the three Baltic republics of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Greece supports membership for Bulgaria.

Of all these prospective members, the US supports only three: the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. Washington's argument for the limited expansion of NATO is essentially financial. US Defence Secretary William Cohen told reporters in Madrid, "The cost to the US for admitting only Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary was estimated at between $150 million and $200 million a year for the next 10 to 12 years." Washington is reluctant to foot that bill.

New NATO members will be entitled to American military protection if attacked by non-NATO states. Few regard Russia as a serious threat to central and eastern European nations, but many former Warsaw Pact members see admission into NATO as a sign of political and economic viability.

Polls conducted a few days before the Madrid summit indicated that most eastern and central European people are unenthusiastic about NATO membership. A recent survey shows that a mere 28 per cent of Czechs support NATO membership and that most Czechs see Germany as a potential threat to Czech sovereignty.

The Poles, too, feel that German economic hegemony poses a greater threat to Polish security than Russian military might. The Russian army's poor performance in Chechnya and before that in Afghanistan left it totally discredited in Eastern European eyes.

Small central and Eastern European countries, like the Czech Republic, have drastically reduced the size of their armed forces in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Czech Republic's army was some 200,000 strong in 1990; today it stands at a mere 60,000. Current Czech military spending is about 1.7 per cent of the Czech gross domestic product, and there are plans to reduce that even further. NATO officials, however, insist that the Czech Republic must increase its military spending.

Differences over military spending have soured the ties between Europe and America. By and large, European nations want to cut defence spending, leaving the Americans to defend the continent. Washington, on the other hand, wants the Europeans to boost defence spending and stop relying heavily on the Americans for Europe's defence.

Two years ago, French President Jacques Chirac announced that France planned to rejoin NATO's military command. France pulled out of NATO's military command in 1966 under the late French President Charles de Gaulle. However, Gaullist President Chirac is at loggerheads with his Socialist prime minister, Lionel Jospin over Chirac's plans to re-integrate France into NATO's military command.

France wants a European to head NATO's Southern Command based in Naples, Italy. Washington insists that an American must head NATO's Southern Command. Just before the Madrid NATO summit, an Elysée Palace statement said that conditions were not right for France's re-integration into NATO's military command. The statement added, "France's aim was to achieve new progress towards a better sharing of NATO responsibilities between Europeans and Americans."

'New era' for Mexico

Will the result of the elections signal the end of the 68-year-PRI stranglehold on Mexico's politics? **Faiza Rady** examines the situation in the aftermath of the Mexican general elections

Fireworks, honking cars and a crowd of jubilant supporters rejoiced at the sweeping victory of mayoral opposition candidate Cuauhtémoc Cardenas at Mexico City's main plaza on Monday. Partying into the wee hours of the morning, more than 15,000 people celebrated the capital's first mayoral election since 1929, an event that signals the first real break in the ruling Institutionalised Revolutionary Party's (PRI) 68-year old monopoly on Mexican politics.

The PRI has held power since its founding in 1929 through a blend of patronage, strong-arm tactics and blatant electoral fraud. "We're celebrating the beginning of democracy in our country. Before we had thieves, corrupt people. Cardenas will be honest," said Maximo Rins, a 51-year-old engineer. "I want the poor to have more. I hope Cardenas will help us," added Guadelupe Bernal, a 31-year-old homemaker.

The ruling party also lost its absolute majority in the Chamber of Deputies, another precedent. The PRI got 38 per cent of the vote in the federal congressional races, compared with 27.4 per cent for the conservative National Action Party (PAN) and 26 per cent for Cardenas' left-of-centre Democratic Revolution Party (PRD).

But the most significant victory was Cardenas' election as mayor of the capital, a sprawling and impoverished city of some 18 million people afflicted with poverty, corruption, police brutality and a soaring crime rate.

A total of 57.7 per cent of Mexico City residents believe that the mayor's first priority should be to combat crime, street gangs and criminality in the police, reported a 2 June opinion poll conducted by the University of Guadalajara's Centre for Opinion Studies. "Mexico City is in the worst shape it has ever been in. Cardenas has an easy act to follow. The standards that he'll be judged by will be pretty forgiving," explained John Bailey, a Mexico expert at Georgetown University.

The son of former President Lazaro Cardenas who held office from 1934 to 1940 and was revered for nationalising Mexico's US-controlled oil industry, Cuauhtémoc Cardenas is the most powerful representative of the Mexican left. He massively defeated the ruling party by capturing 48 per cent of the vote, while his main challenger, PRI candidate Alfredo Del Mazo, trailed far behind with 26 per cent. PAN contender, Carlos Castillo Peraza, came in third with 16 per cent of the votes.

Cardenas' resounding victory gives him considerable political clout as an opposition leader. It also makes him the most powerful man in the country after President Ernesto Zedilla and paves his way to the next presidential elections. Cardenas readily acknowledged his political ambitions. "We are preparing to win in 2000. That is the objective of the party," he told a group of supporters on Sunday.

A veteran politician, Cardenas represented the PRI as governor of the state of Michoacan in the '70s, but later broke with the party over its refusal to reform the electoral process and formed the PRD in 1989, a coalition of the Catholic and Socialist left. Advocating a centre-left platform based on socialist reforms, the PRD's programme includes land reform and the nationalisation of key industries.



Supporters cheer the victory of Cuauhtémoc Cardenas as the first democratically elected mayor of Mexico City in 68 years *(photo: Reuters)*

Cardenas ran for the presidency in 1988, despite the murder of a top aide, a clear warning for him to back off. He had been leading in the polls before election day but a computer breakdown stopped the vote count for hours soon after it began. When the vote count resumed days later, PRI candidate Carlos Salinas (1988-1994) was declared the winner. When Cardenas demanded an investigation, the ballot records were destroyed in a mysterious fire. Cardenas also lost a second bid for the presidency against the PRI's Ernesto Zedillo in 1994, albeit less dramatically.

Although President Zedillo initially vowed to combat corruption, reform the electoral process and restore democracy, he did not abide by his words. His administration followed traditional PRI practices and engaged in widespread election fraud during the 1995 legislative elections. At the time, many reports of vote-buying and voter intimidation were reported in Yucatan state. Voters were not allowed to cast ballots secretly in central Yucatan and people complained of officials threatening with the loss of jobs or government benefits, if they did not vote for the ruling party.

However, widespread social protests over the ruling party's institutionalised electoral fraud, exacerbated by the worst recession to hit the country in six decades, finally forced Zedillo to make good on his campaign pledges. Attempting to defuse the people's anger, the president established an independent Federal Electoral Institute to oversee elections. In addition, federal funds granted to opposition parties allowed candidates to buy television slots for the first time.

As a result of these reforms, observers described Sunday's elections as "the cleanest in decades". Nevertheless, fraud was reported in the oil-rich state of Campeche, where PRD candidate Layda Sansores and 300 supporters stormed state election headquarters demanding that the council's PRI president "stop faking the figures".

Most observers believe that deteriorating material conditions caused the PRI's dramatic backslide at the polls. "Massive unemployment, hunger wages, soaring bankruptcy, asphyxiating indebtedness, spiraling public insecurity, substandard health, education and housing determine the Mexicans' disenchantment with the ruling party," wrote journalist Carlos Acosta in the Mexican daily *Proceso*.

Political analysts blame failed neo-liberal policies for the country's economic woes. In the late 1980s, The Carlos Salinas administration started privatising major industries and rolling back state services. While the government controlled some 1,500 public enterprises in '82, it currently only retains about one hundred companies. As a result of the wholesale dumping of the public sector, 10 major financial monopolies emerged which control 71 per cent of the stock market shares. "By selling the nation's patrimony to a handful of wealthy families, the government has created a dangerous rupture of the social fabric," explained political analyst Jaime Avilés. In effect, 10 per cent of the population now controls 70 per cent of the national revenue, while 90 per cent share the rest. "The extraordinary wealth of the privileged elite could make one forget the abject poverty which is the lot of the majority," commented prominent linguist and political writer Noam Chomsky.

Among the 32.2 million registered workers in 1996, 21.5 million are either underemployed or unemployed and half the workforce makes less than the minimum wage. Moreover, 11.55 per cent of employees go without any kind of pay, reports Carlos Acosta, from the prestigious National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Computer Science.

Although the government pledged that foreign investment would help solve the country's unemployment problem, this never materialised. Between 1988 and 1994, it was estimated that the stock market attracted $100 billion of purely speculative foreign capital that was never productively invested into the economy or used to create a single job. When the Zapatistas' armed insurrection in the impoverished province of Chiapas triggered investor nervousness, causing massive capital fight and the disastrous stock market crash of December '94, the state lost most of the capital assets it had gained from the public sector sale. As a direct result of the market crash, thousands of businesses went bankrupt and 800,000 people lost their jobs.

Meanwhile, much of the new capital has been invested in the narco business. The *New York Times* reported that as much as $7 billion dollars of the national revenue may come from drug trafficking, with established links to the ruling political establishment.

Choked by unemployment and poverty while witnessing the economic and political elite's easy and oftentimes dubious access to massive wealth, Mexicans were finally able to respond at the polls. Expressing the people's aspirations, Nobel-prize winning novelist Octavio Paz said: "The electoral process of 6 July perhaps represents a new era in the history of Mexico."

Che found

A CUBAN doctor has declared that a set of human bones found in a communal grave near an old airstrip at Vallegrande, 740km southeast of the Bolivian capital La Paz, belong to the legendary revolutionary Ernesto "Che" Guevara, whose burial place has remained a 30-year-old mystery.

CIA-backed Bolivian special forces seized Guevara and other freedom fighters on 8 October 1967 and executed them. After killing Guevara, the soldiers cut off his hands.

Guevara was a charismatic Argentinian doctor who, with Fidel Castro, helped lead the armed struggle against the Cuban dictator, Fulgencio Batista. He held several cabinet posts in Havana, before joining the Bolivian revolution.

After his death Guevara became a cult figure, inspiring liberation movements around the world.

Socialists win in Albania

ALBANIA'S Socialists, on Sunday, claimed victory in the second round of legislative elections. Citing unofficial results, they said their alliance had won 12 of the 20 constituencies reported so far, including all those in the capital Tirana.

Socialist leader Fatos Nano declared that he was confident of becoming the next prime minister of this impoverished Balkan nation. Voting was peaceful, but the turnout was low. Only an estimated 40-50 per cent of the electorate voted in the 34 constituencies where a second round was being held, compared to 70.3 per cent last week, the central electoral commission said.

The Socialists are already assured of gaining an absolute majority in parliament after capturing at least 81 of the 188 seats from last Sunday's first round, whereas the Democratic Party can only count on some 20 seats. Democratic Party officials and their supporters have already warned that they challenge the legitimacy of the new parliament.

Labour flounders in Orangemen march

Allowing the Protestant Drumcree march to go ahead may have brought the honeymoon between the new Labour government and the nationalists in Northern Ireland to an abrupt end. **Doaa El-Bey** reports from London

Widespread protests and rioting shook Northern Ireland following the government's decision to allow the Protestant Orangemen to march through a Roman Catholic area near Drumcree, southwest of Belfast, on Sunday.

Cars were burnt, over 100 people were injured and a young policewoman was shot during clashes between the Northern Ireland police, nationalists (Catholics) and loyalists (Protestants). And province-wide rioting continued for more than 48 hours after the parade, leaving one man dead.

Although the scale of confrontation during the march was less than expected, the angry protests showed that the decision to allow the Orangemen to proceed along Garvaghy Road was not welcomed by a sizeable part of the community in Northern Ireland.

The decision, announced by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) Chief Constable Ronnie Flanagan, came as a surprise to the Catholic community which had expected the new Labour government to stop Protestant marches through Catholic-populated areas. It was regarded as the government's first real test and ended the two-month honeymoon with the nationalists, shattering the fragile trust between the two.

But Flanagan said he was left with no option but to allow the march to follow its traditional route after the Orangemen and the residents of the Garvaghy Road failed to reach a compromise. "The choice I was left with was a simple, stark choice in terms of balancing the two evils. Each evil threatened to bring about serious violence. I am talking about loss of life. I apologise to the people of Garvaghy Road for the gross inconvenience this has caused," he said.

The secretary of state for Northern Ireland, Mo Mowlam, was no less apologetic. She assured the Garvaghy Road residents that their voices and feelings had not been ignored and said that she would address them in legislation on the marching issue next year. "I am only sorry that option was not open to me this summer," she added.

By allowing the march, both Flanagan and Mowlam were trying to avoid the collapse of the already fragile loyalist ceasefire, the sectarian murder of Catholics by loyalist paramilitaries, and the strong possibility of a protest by the Orangemen. Last year a three-day protest by Orangemen over the decision to re-route the march brought Ulster to a complete standstill, which forced the then-Chief Constable Hugh Annesley to reverse his decision. Violent protests and confrontations followed, causing damage of over 20 million pounds sterling.

Nevertheless, the decision to allow the march strained the government's relationship with the nationalists and failed to coax the Unionists into a concession that would boost the peace process. The Unionists regarded the go-ahead decision as confirming their right to march, while the nationalists regarded it as an indication that the government believed that their anger could be contained, whereas the Unionists' anger could not.

Nationalists were furious that the decision to allow this year's march was taken without consulting the residents of Garvaghy Road. Mowlam had promised that they would be notified of whatever decision had been taken before the day of the march, but no notification was given. The residents also felt that they had been deceived by the government forces which surrounded Drumcree church in the early hours of Sunday morning, causing both Protestants and Catholics to believe that the march would be stopped. But, just a few hours later, the forces lined Garvaghy Road with armoured vehicles to secure the way for the Orangemen's parade along the road.

As a result, chants like "Mo must go" and "no cease-fire" were heard among Catholic crowds for the first time since Labour came to power.

Sinn Fein was critical of the government's decision. Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams denounced the government and the RUC and said that the nationalists would never "lie down".

Francae Molloy, a spokesman for Sinn Fein, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the latest decision made the government's relationship with the nationalists "very low and very poor" because it had sided with the Unionists. He confirmed that the way Mowlam dealt with the situation implanted mistrust in the relationship and added that the government's attitude made it difficult for Sinn Fein to rebuild the peace process.

"Sunday's incidents showed that both [Prime Minister Tony] Blair and Mowlam failed in Northern Ireland. The signals sent on that day showed that hopes of negotiating a peaceful settlement are slim," Molloy said.

However he ruled out that Sunday's march would convince the IRA to postpone declaring a cease-fire.

The strained relations with nationalists was not balanced by concessions from the Unionists, the Orangemen emerged from the Drumcree parade determined to abide by their right to march through Garvaghy Road every year. And they did not show any indication that they would waive their right to march on Saturday and Sunday in Belfast and Londonderry, despite Secretary Mowlam's appeals. These marches are likely to cause more tension in the region.

Commenting on the right of the Orangemen to march through Drumcree, Ulster Unionist leader David Trimble said that the area was originally Protestant. "The Protestants have been driven out... Their attitude is that they are not going to be driven out of what is part of their town."

Ian Paisley, of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the chief constable took "a difficult but right decision". "The chief constable was choosing between right and wrong," he added.

He ruled out that the decision could sabotage an IRA cease-fire. "There is no cease-fire and there will not be one. The IRA is using the peace process and the cease-fire for its own tactical advantages," Paisley asserted.

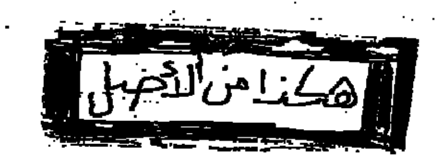
Battle for Brazzaville

MEDIATORS, this week, called for new talks to end the fighting in Congo's capital after the forces of President Pascal Lissouba and Marxist militia leader Denis Sassou Nguesso ignored a previously negotiated ceasefire. The mediators, led by Brazzaville mayor, Bernard Kolelas, urged an end to the battle for control of the town which has left some 3,000 dead and scores more wounded since 5 June.

A diplomatic source said forces loyal to Lissouba fought with Sassou Nguesso's militia in the centre of the city close to the Sofitel Hotel. Fighting erupted when Sassou Nguesso's militiamen tried to move towards the hotel, sparking a "strong" response from government forces.

The fighting in Brazzaville began after government troops surrounded the home of Sassou Nguesso and attempted to disarm his militia ahead of presidential elections due to take place later this month. Lissouba's forces control nearly all the city centre and the international airport. The front line basically runs along the railway line which traverses the city from east to west.

Under the constitution, the president's mandate can be extended for three months if it is impossible to organise scheduled elections. Most observers believe that the presidential elections planned for 27 July will be postponed because of the clashes.



So near, and yet out of reach

World poverty can be eradicated. All it takes is a sum less than the combined income of the seven richest men in the world. **Faiza Rady** reviews a United Nations report on the problem

"Poverty is no longer inevitable. The world has the material and natural resources, the know-how and the people to make a poverty-free world a reality in less than a generation."
James Gustave Speth, United Nations Development Programme Administrator, 1997

The battle against poverty in southern nations has come far over the past 30 years, according to an independent study commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). But, the 1997 Human Development Report (HDR) stressed, there is still a long way to go.

China has halved the proportion of its people living below the poverty line and in India poverty has been reduced by 25 per cent over the last three decades. More than three-quarters of the world's population can now expect to survive to age 40. Adult illiteracy has been reduced by nearly half and infant mortality has been cut by nearly three-fifths, the report states.

Yet, despite the progress, the report warns that such figures can be deceiving as they only give an aggregate picture of a world still largely plagued by poverty. Whereas some regions have progressed considerably, others have lagged behind. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, the life-expectancy of 50 years is 19 years lower than the East Asian average of 69 years.

"Three new global pressures creating and re-creating poverty — violent conflicts, HIV/AIDS and environmental degradation — have pushed millions of people back into poverty in the past 15 years, eroding their assets and destroying their lives," said the report.

As in previous years, the HDR uses a "Human Development Index" (HDI) to grade countries according to an aggregate index of life expectancy, educational achievement and a decent standard of living. In addition, the 1997 report devised a special "Human Poverty Index" (HPI), defined as "a country-by-country measure of poverty from the human perspective based on three variables: vulnerability of death at an early age; illiteracy; and a less-than-decent standard of living comprised of lack of access to health services, safe water and adequate food."

The HPI is seen as more accurate because it goes beyond conventional measures of poverty that rely purely on income distribution. "The HPI looks at whether people in the developing world have the basic choices and opportunities to lead a long and healthy life and to enjoy a decent standard of living," explains the report.


photo: Mohamed Wassim

Among the 1.3 billion, who live on less than one dollar a day, and the 800 million malnourished people, it is the children who suffer most

Among the 78 southern countries cited in the index, Trinidad and Tobago, Chile, Singapore, Costa Rica and Cuba top the list for having reduced poverty to less than 10 per cent of their population. The countries with the lowest ranking are Niger, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mali, Cambodia and Mozambique — where poverty exceeds 50 per cent, the highest level worldwide.

About one third of the population of developing countries — some 1.3 billion people — still live on less than one dollar a day, and more than 800 million people are malnourished.

The South Asian subcontinent, with 510 million people defined as "income-poor", has the largest number of people living in poverty. Sub-Saharan Africa — with 220 million poor, representing about 40 per cent of the population — has the greatest proportional incidence and growth of poverty. Although Latin America has reduced the incidence of poverty to 15 per cent of its population, more than 110 million people still fall below the poverty line continent-wide. The countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union have witnessed the greatest erosion of their real income since the fall of socialism. While only four million people in the region lived below the poverty line a decade ago, 120 million — a quarter of the population — are currently defined as poor.

To combat poverty the report recommends that northern countries improve trade terms and market access to southern nations. Countries in the south lose more than 60 billion dollars a year as a result of agricultural subsidies and barriers to textile exports to the north. It is crucial, therefore, that developed countries help poor countries by facilitating their entry into global markets, the report recommends.

Commenting on the disparity between rich and poor nations, the HDR noted that powerful economies are largely reaping the profits of globalisation, whereas the south has become increasingly marginalised. Tariffs on imports to industrialised countries from the least developed countries, for example, are 30 per cent higher than the global average.

"Annual losses for developing countries from unequal access to trade, labour and finance have been estimated at 500 billion dollars, ten times what they receive in foreign aid," said Richard Jolly, the report's coordinator.

The ratio of trade to gross domestic product has increased worldwide, but it has decreased for 44 southern nations, — with a total population of more than one billion people — he added. Jolly further denounced the fact that the least developed countries, with 10 per cent the world's people, have only 0.3 per cent of world trade — half their share of two decades ago.

In addition to changing unequal terms of trade, the HDR recommended the immediate provision of much needed social services to the poor. The annual cost of offering basic services to the needy worldwide is estimated at 40 billion dollars for the next 10 years, which is less than 0.2 per cent of the aggregate world income of 25 trillion dollars. And the cost of pushing the annual income of impoverished people above the poverty line would require an additional annual 40 billion dollars. The universal access to basic social services to alleviate income poverty would roughly cost 80 billion dollars, Jolly concluded — "less than the combined worth of the seven richest men in the world."

Newer deal on independence day

On the 221st anniversary of the independence of the United States, Americans debate the future of government social programmes as the world watches. **Lamis Andoni** reports from Washington on the controversy surrounding welfare reform

Americans celebrated the 4th of July this year with great fanfare, as cities and towns from the Atlantic to the Pacific put on colourful parades and fireworks. It is a day Americans consider as an occasion to celebrate "American values" and take pride in being American.

This year, however, a debate rages across the country that questions the fundamental underpinnings of American government. For behind the festive facade of firecrackers, marching bands and barbecue, lurk increasing concerns about the end of the "welfare state" — the sytem that has provided a degree of social balance between the rich and the poor since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Acknowledging this dramatic turning point in the country's history, President Bill Clinton focused his weekly radio address on welfare reforms that will practically end government assistance to the poor and the unemployed.

Clinton tried to reassure the people that the welfare reform programme will not be carried out at the expense of the poor and that it will create jobs and enhance equality of opportunity — a main component of the "American dream".

As the leader of the most powerful capitalist country, Clinton's message has broader implications for a world where many countries are moving away from government subsidies and where the private sector is being given the role of ensuring some sort of social equilibrium. The success or failure of what is being called "welfare reform" in the US will undoubtedly influence the course of globalisation and free market economics.

The new American legislation will limit public assistance to the needy to five years and stipulates that adults cannot continue to receive welfare if they remain without work for more than two years. The government has shifted the responsibility for job creation to the private sector, which is to provide training programmes and hire-for-training opportunities. Participating businesses will be rewarded through tax credits and government funding for training programmes.

The programmes, which will be implemented differently in each of the 50 states, are aimed at reducing government spending and drawing welfare recipients into the workforce. Its proponents, who are mainly members of the Republican Party, argue that it will put an end to a culture of dependence that they say has depleted government funds and caused a drastic decline in productivity.

The American media has repeatedly reported cases of welfare recipients who have turned welfare into a way of life in order to avoid working. They have also pointed to cases of individuals illegally receiving government paychecks in the name of deceased relatives. But critics of the reforms counter that these cases are the exception and not the norm.

The main argument against the most recent welfare reforms is that they transfer government funds from the poor to the rich. Reverend Douglas Miles, who is leading a protest movement against Clinton's programme, was quoted recently by *The Nation* as saying, "It is a transfer of wealth from the neediest to the greediest through tax credits, state subsidies to private employers and replacement of working poor with free labour."

Proponents of the reforms, however, counter that the gradual removal of people from welfare and their inclusion in the work force will have far-reaching social and economic benefits.

The arguments of both camps have yet to be tested, but the way the programme is supposed to be implemented raises many questions about its social ramifications.

First, while private companies will have to agree to introduce hire-for-training programmes, there are no guarantees that temporary employees will find permanent jobs once the programmes are over.

Second, many activists point out that temporary employees will be exploited by companies in the name of job creation. Under the new system, around 50 per cent of adults on welfare would have to put in 30 hours of "work experience" every week.

Businesses who have agreed to endorse the programmes disagree. They say that it is the employers who are making a major concession by agreeing to train mostly unskilled labour with little or no higher education.

Yet even if the new arrangements solve the problems of some individuals, the most feared social repercussion of "welfare reform" is that it will hamper the struggle to improve wages. Critics argue that bringing welfare recipients into competition for the lowest-paid jobs will push others out of work while businesses reap incentive benefits. Consequently, opponents of the programme expect a widening gap between the haves and have-nots in the years to come. This would constitute a reversal of one of the *main goals of the welfare state developed by* Franklin D. Roosevelt.

It is ironic that President Clinton will go down in history as the man who reversed one of the major legacies of his idol. Roosevelt embraced government aid to the needy to pre-empt a social upheaval following the 1929 stock market crash. Since that time, welfare has often been viewed as crucial to ensuring the survival of capitalism, by providing assistance to the poor and thus helping to prevent class polarisation.

In the early eighties, calls for a return to pure laissez-faire economics were translated into concrete policies with the election of Republican President Ronald Reagan. Many believe that one of the main reasons for President Clinton's election in 1992 was a popular rejection of 12 years of Republican policies aimed at dismantling welfare and other government programmes designed to give equal opportunity to the poor and minorities.

But to the dismay of many Democrats, there has been tremendous pressure from rightwing Republicans — who took control of Congress in 1994 — to dismantle the welfare state. Clinton argues that without his leadership the rightwing Republican Congress would have introduced even harsher measures.

The president says that his package will make welfare a transitional stage for the unemployed and not a way of life. The new system, however, does not guarantee a long-term solution for inequality or unemployment. Furthermore, the main victims of the new system are children, women, and minorities, since 37 per cent of the current 13 million welfare recipients are black and around 70 per cent are children.

The Clinton administration insists that its welfare record is stellar, pointing out that the number of welfare recipients has declined by three million since Clinton took office.

But these numbers do not convince Clinton's critics of the wisdom of his new programme. They maintain that the programme will hurt *the standard of living of many working Americans.* They would prefer the government itself to administer funds for creating jobs instead of placing the poor at the mercy of big companies. The current system, they predict, will create an illusion, not a solution, since most of the welfare recipients will not find permanent jobs but will be moving in and out of unemployment.

The idea of government-sponsored job placements has met resistance from many economists and congressmen whose primary goal is a reduction of the national budget deficit. Many liberal critics, however, say this debate should be focused instead on who should pay for lowering the deficit. They accuse Clinton of pandering to the military industry, which they say has led to the current need to cut aid to the poor.

For Republicans, meanwhile, Clinton's reforms are far from sufficient. They have called for further budget cuts.

The welfare reform battle will be a testing ground not only for the capitalist system but for the value system associated with it. Two hundred years after the founding of the US, the debate between laissez-faire economics and social justice remains unresolved.

'Sorry, no refuge here'

In its annual report, Amnesty International UK accuses developed countries of violating human rights through their treatment of refugees. **Doaa El-Bey** in London reviews the report

In its 1997 annual report, the human rights organisation Amnesty International UK has linked the growing refugee crisis to human rights abuses.

The report, which looked at human rights violations in 151 countries worldwide from January to December 1996, *highlighted* the refugee crisis as the most visible illustration of the effect of human rights violations.

The number of refugees has almost doubled from eight to 15 million during the last decade, disclosed the report, which was published on 18 June. At the same time, 1996 witnessed a marked deterioration in the level of international protection for refugees as the political will of states weakened in the face of the increasing refugee movement.

Rwanda, Zaire, Burundi, Bosnia and Algeria were among the countries with the worst refugee problems last year, the report said, and it criticised the majority of the world states for failing to offer refuge to people from these troubled areas.

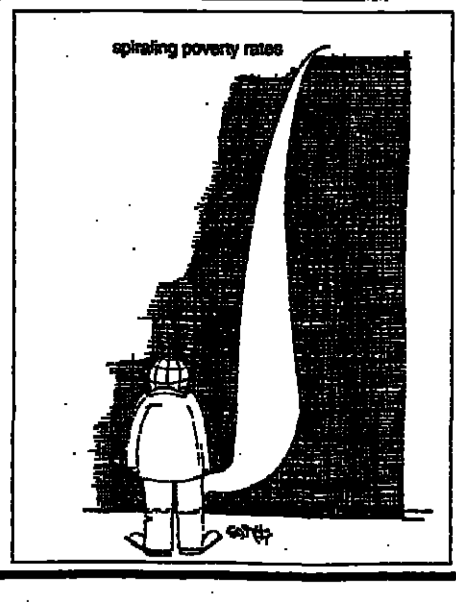
The report focused on the northern states, or the world's richest countries, which host the minority of *the world*'s refugees. "While these countries accept in theory the principle of non-refoulement [forcibly returning individuals to countries where their lives or freedom is threatened], in practice they return refugees by employing a variety of legal and administrative measures," the report stated.

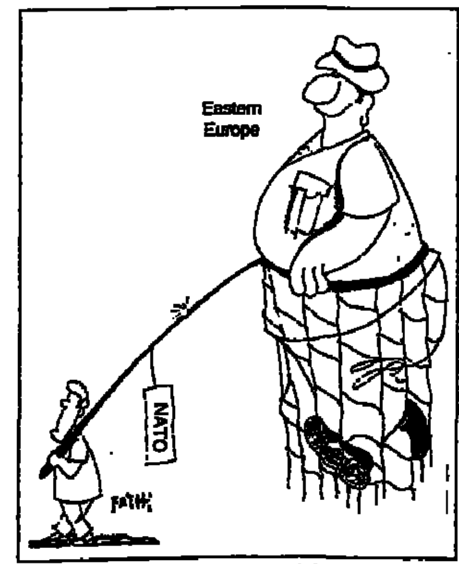
In an attempt to obstruct access to refugees, the report listed certain measures taken by northern states, including rejection at the border, carrier sanctions — whereby fines are imposed on ship owners and airlines that allow people without the required documents to board their carriers — and visa requirements that are *impossible for asylum seekers to provide.*

The report mentioned that some states offload their obligations by sending asylum seekers to supposedly safe Third World countries that they often have no connection with. Many Third World countries are far from safe, the report added. Some do not stick to the international refugee treaties or do not have adequate mechanisms to deal with asylum seekers. Pakistan was named as one of the unsafe Third World countries offering asylum to refugees from Afghanistan.

In addition, the report highlighted thousands of cases of extra-judicial executions, torture and ill-treatment in many countries, including the northern states, which constantly accuse Third World countries of violating human rights.







Borrow from the World Bank and die

Bharat Jhunjhunwala argues that it is actually dangerous for Third World countries to borrow from the World Bank

The World Bank has come out with a 'Strategic Compact', an administrative reorganisation of sorts, aimed at increasing the developmental impact of its lending. The objective is to bring down the World Bank's transaction costs and do better what it has been doing until now. But, should we not pause to ask what it has actually achieved before we get hyped about its efficiency? Has its lending so far been of any avail? If not, greater efficiency may only increase the destructive impact of the World Bank's lending.

Why should borrowing from the World Bank be harmful for the borrower? One possible reason is that even relatively small amounts of foreign funding disturb the pattern of a country's expenditures and distract government attention from the main issues.

Take the example of AIDS programmes in India, for instance. Western countries are highly concerned with this *problem and have, therefore, placed huge funds at the dis*posal of the government of India for its control. The district health authorities, in turn, are told to initiate AIDS control programmes and directed to spend the entire budget within a specified period. It does not matter whether AIDS is a priority in the area or not.

The District Health Officer suddenly finds himself with millions of dollars for AIDS control and is under pressure to spend it. His attention is diverted from malaria and leprosy which may be the raging problems in his district. As a result, the incidence of these diseases rises and the general health of the people deteriorates while the government is busy battling AIDS. The net impact of the loans turns out to be negative.

Then, there is the matter of corruption. Foreign funds come in torrents and with liberal provisions for the construction of new buildings, purchase of equipment and travel allowances. Considering the rampant corruption prevailing nowadays, much of the money goes into the pockets of the officers while the debt of the country remains. As former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi commented, only 15 cents out of every dollar borrowed by the government reaches the poor. Thus, of every dollar borrowed only 15 cents is productively utilised but the whole dollar has to be repaid.

Data show that countries that have borrowed heavily from the World Bank have had lower rates of growth. According to World Bank statistics, in the 1980s, among the countries having a population of more than 5 million in Africa, the Bank lent most to the Ivory Coast to the tune of $30 per capita. Its rate of growth was -4.6 per cent. Nigeria, on the other band, borrowed the least at $7 per capita. Its growth rate was 1.2 per cent.

In Latin America, South and East Asia, the World Bank's lending appears to have had no impact on the rate of growth. In Latin America, Argentina and Mexico borrowed most at $34 and $30 per capita respectively. Their growth rate were 2.0 and 0.9 per cent respectively. El Salvador and Guatemala borrowed least at $12 and $7. Their growth rates were 2.2 per cent and 0.9 per cent. In South Asia, Sri Lanka borrowed $12 and India $5 and both had growth rates of 2.9 per cent. In East Asia, Korea at $20 and China at $2. Both had growth rates of 7.8 per cent. In every developing region in the world, World Bank lending has at best had no impact, at worst has been outright harmful.

One could argue that such isolated examples do not prove the point. Economists use regression analysis to overcome this difficulty and ascertain the relative influences of domestic savings, debt, foreign investment and World Bank loans on growth. The results of a regression analysis of 37 countries of a population of more than 5 million is edifying. It turns out that since the '80s for each percentage point increase in the rate of domestic savings, the growth rate increased by 0.11 per cent. However, it decreased by 0.16 per cent for each dollar increase in per capita borrowing from the World Bank. Savings is the sure prescription for growth and World Bank lending a certain one for killing it.

It is clear that something is wrong. World Bank loans, instead of promoting growth, reduce it. And the World Bank, instead of finding the causes of this sad situation, is only interested in making its loans more 'efficient', more destructive, that is. It is the duty of leaders and public activists in Third World countries not to run after World Bank loans and to put their houses in order instead. *The countries of the South, individually as* well as collectively, must consider setting up a commission to assess the impact of such loans .



The writer is a Delhi-based columnist.

Edited by **Gamal Nkrumah**

Making common market sense

Long in the making, the idea of an Arab common market seems to be gaining momentum for both political and economic reasons, report Dina Ezzat and Aziza Sami

A unified economic entity bringing together the Arab states, long seen as the real key to securing the political clout of the Arab countries and their economic prosperity has remained elusive for decades.

Now, however, over 40 years after the idea for such an institution was first voiced during the inaugural meeting of the Union of Arab Chambers of Commerce only to fall by the wayside shortly thereafter, the issue has been embraced with new vigour, particularly in Egypt and Syria.

While some of the Egyptian and Syrian efforts have sought to simply get the ball rolling on establishing even a down-sized version of this market, more extensive efforts, bringing together other Arab countries, have come within the framework of joint committees.

Focusing their attention on economic matters, with the private sector playing a key role, bilateral committees have been convened among several Arab states — namely Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, Libya and Oman. These countries have sought to take the first steps towards establishing the common market through the formation of an Arab free trade area (FTA). — at first on the bilateral level, then expanding it to embrace other Arab countries, including Iraq.

"Now, both global and regional economic circumstances make the idea of Arab economic integration a must," said Raouf Saad, assistant to the minister of foreign affairs. In fact, he noted, the global economy today is conducive to integration.

As a prelude to the common market, the Ministerial Council of the Arab League adopted a resolution in 1996 calling for the FTA to be established by 1998. The resolution stated that non-tariff barriers should be eliminated and that tariffs be gradually reduced until complete liberalisation was reached by the end of the year 2007. And, despite the formation of a core ministerial committee to work on launching this area, the goals of the resolution have yet to be completely realised. So far, Egypt has signed a free trade agreement with Jordan, and is in the final stages of concluding similar pacts with Tunisia, Morocco, Lebanon, Kuwait, Syria and Libya.

The impetus behind these initiatives is that it would be politically and economically hazardous for Arab countries to remain divided, at a time when the world is coming together in large economic blocs.

As they move towards liberalising their economies, "many Arab countries are undertaking massive structural adjustments and economic reforms which will facilitate the task of integrating [economically] with other countries," said the Foreign Ministry's Saad.

Aside from the economic factors, there are political overtones to this common market initiative. Calls for the formation of an Arab common market reached a crescendo last month during the meeting of the foreign ministers of the Damascus Declaration, to which Egypt, Syria and the Gulf Cooperation Council are signatories.

At the meeting, Syria and Egypt put forth a proposal for the quick implementation of an Arab FTA. But at a time when Israel is dealing serious blows to the peace process, analysts argue that the push for inter-Arab cooperation and integration is a means of avoiding the complete normalisation of relations with Israel. In so doing, some of the Arab states are now, in effect, moving away from the idea behind regional integration through the Middle East/North Africa economic (MENA) conferences, which came about through the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993.

This is the quandary facing prospective participants in the fourth MENA conference, scheduled to be held in Doha, Qatar, in November. While Qatar is determined to go ahead with hosting this forum that would include both Arab countries and Israel, some Arab states, such as Syria and Saudi Arabia, are equally determined to boycott it.

On the record, Egypt has yet to make a commitment either way. Foreign Minister Amr Moussa pointed out that "it is still too early to decide."

But privately, Egyptian officials are candid in expressing their wariness.

"Egypt feels that going ahead with the meeting, despite Israel's stance towards peace, would be putting the entire process in jeopardy," said a diplomatic source on condition of anonymity. "It would break Arab ranks and encourage Israel to be more intransigent."

"Qatar, however, feels that it will get a good deal of economic and political prestige by hosting this conference," he added.

Saad admits that "peace is a necessity for regional cooperation". But he is reluctant to embrace the idea that an Arab common market is being initiated to slow down the pace of regional integration that some Arab countries believe would be tantamount to rewarding Israel for its intransigence.

"There is no connection [between the two forms of cooperation]," stressed Saad. "The idea of an Arab common market is a very strategic endeavour that should not be based on ad hoc events."

Instead, he argued, the integration of the Egyptian economy into the broader economic context is pursued on three tracks — inter-Arab, Euro-Mediterranean and Middle Eastern. Each of these tracks "has its own circumstances and conditions," he stated. "I don't think it would be appropriate to substitute one for the other."

Nevertheless, the question of "why now" is still unanswered. The time is right, and the "ingredients" for the market are, on the whole, available, commented Saad.

Today, the population of the Arab world is around 252 million. Arab countries have their hands on 62 per cent of the world's known oil reservoirs, 22 per cent of the natural gas reserves and $33 billion in financial reserves. However, the cumulative Arab GDP is estimated at no more than $529 billion, and inter-arab trade does not exceed 10 per cent of the Arab countries' total trade with the world.

"Most of the Arab countries are implementing economic reforms providing the basic infrastructure for inter-Arab cooperation," Saad noted. "The private sector is emerging [around the Arab world] as a leading and pivotal force." And the movement of Arab labour among the Arab League member states also helps push along the concept of economic integration.

Despite these apparent reform strides, Arab economies still seem to be beset by a number of problems, such as a similarity in the productive structures of the various economies. Even among the most economically integrated states, such as the GCC's members, there are problems with the unification of fiscal policies and the reduction of tariff barriers.

The way to overcome these obstacles, said Saad, would be through implementing government policies which encourage economic specialisation based on where each country's competitive advantage lies.

"Over the past decade, Arab economies have reached the potential of complementing each others' economies, as well as specialising," stated the Foreign Ministry official. Some countries have focused on petrochemicals or metallurgical industries, while others have garnered more experience in food processing and pharmaceuticals, continued Saad.

Another vehicle for overcoming some of these obstacles and establishing the long-awaited market can be found in the economic wing of the Arab League. An Arab business council has been formed to promote private sector projects.

Similarly, bilateral agreements between Arab states could play a key role in creating the free trade areas, open the door for the common market and encourage inter-Arab investment.

However, in order to establish even the most rudimentary FTA, a great deal of work needs to be done. Preferential treatment that helps eliminate or diminish trade barriers is a must, as is increasing economic complimentarity in order to avoid a conflict of interest between Arab states. Additionally, Arab governments will have to be more aggressive in creating an investor-friendly climate and encouraging the in-flow of Arab capital.

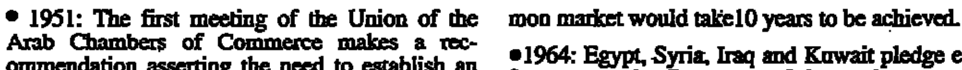
According to one source at the Foreign Ministry, who also requested anonymity, what it boils down to is more liberalisation.

"But this is the kind of thing that's easier to talk about than do," said the source who participated in last month's meeting of the Damascus Declaration countries.

At that meeting, he said, "some of the states welcomed the idea, but others seemed to be apprehensive because a free trade area may bring with it some short-term economic disadvantages for them."

What counts at this stage, he continued, "is to get a good number of Arab states to realise that the long-term economic and political benefits of Arab economic integration cannot be secured without paying the price."

This price, believes Saad of the Foreign Ministry, is one that some countries seem willing to pay if they have to. By 1998 at least two or three countries will start taking steps towards bringing this goal of a common market closer to reality, he stated. By adopting a "realistic, pragmatic, and gradual approach", the task could be accomplished, Saad predicted.



Chronology of the market

- 1951: The first meeting of the Union of the Arab Chambers of Commerce makes a recommendation asserting the need to establish an Arab common market.
- 1958: The Union of Arab Chambers of Commerce discusses the means of establishing an Arab common market.
- 1959: Arab officials declare that the necessary measures should be undertaken to launch the rab common market by 1960.
- 1960: The Arab states emphasise their intention to go ahead with establishing an Arab common market.
- 1962: The Arab states say that the Arab common market would take10 years to be achieved.
- 1964: Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Kuwait pledge efforts to get the first stage of the Arab common market going within the next 12 months.
- 1981: Egypt calls for the establishment of an Arab common market.
- 1988: The heads of some Arab states advocate the need to establish an Arab common market.
- 1996: The Arab Summit pledges its commitment to establish an Arab common market.
- 1997: A number of Arab states say they are working towards the establishment of a limited rab common market.

Egypt emerging as exhibition magnet

Egypt could soon compete with the Gulf countries as a regional trade and exhibition hub. Aziza Sami reports

Egypt is rapidly beginning to tap into the lucrative conference and exhibition market which was, until recently, dominated by the Gulf states.

Over the past five years, several major exhibitions have been held in Cairo, including events such as the International Arab Travel Market, Environment '97, and Inter-Build. Some of these exhibitions have been sponsored by the government, but on the whole it has been the private sector which played a leading role in organising the international events.

More than just displays for new and innovative products and services, these exhibitions have become major consumer events held both in the Cairo International Conference Centre (CICC) and five-star hotels.

The recent increase in conference and exhibition activity seems at least to be related to the construction and tourism boom taking place around the country. Six major conferences will be held in 1997-98, spanning the economic, industrial and infrastructural spectrum. These events will involve a number of international investors, some of whom have attended trade shows held in Dubai last April. The shows were organised by IIR Exhibitions, a company affiliated to the Institute for International Research.

IIR Exhibitions, the world's largest business conference organiser, has signed contracts with the CICC for the six events set to take place in 1997-98. The first show, Buildex '97, is linked to the construction industry and will be held in October. It will be followed by Industry in the Middle East in November, Arab Health in December, Oil and Gas in the Middle East in February, 1998, Comdex in May and Middle East Energy in December. Comdex, a major computer and telecommunications event, has so far only been held in the US.

"We are bringing in companies that are interested in working in Egypt, others which already have a presence here and new ones that are excited about the investment opportunities in the country," said Michael El-Nayyal of IIR Exhibitions.

Tapping into this conference and exhibition boom are an ever-increasing number of organising companies, many of whom are multinationals. The market, however, is still ripe for the picking say industry officials.

"There are a lot of conference organisers in Egypt because its is a very interesting market that boasts tremendous potential in industry and has excellent exhibition facilities," said El-Nayyal.

Boost for Egypt-Jordan trade

EGYPT and Jordan this week, within the framework of a joint commission that met for two days, signed six agreements aimed at boosting bilateral economic cooperation and trade liberalisation.

The agreements, signed during the 14th session of the Supreme Egypt-Jordan Joint Commission, included a cultural and scientific protocol, a bilateral agreement connecting the two countries' electrical grids and a memorandum of understanding covering the fields of managerial and administrative development.

The two sides also discussed a number of joint projects, among which was the establishment of a 270-kilometre natural gas pipeline for the export of Egyptian gas to Jordan. The pipeline will run through Sinai.

During the inaugural session, Egyptian Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri and his Jordanian counterpart Abdel-Salam Al-Majali, both of whom headed the joint commission, stressed the need to unify Arab resources through the establishment of an Arab common market.

Egyptian-Jordanian trade in 1996 reached LE140 million. There are, however, over 130 joint projects between the two countries, valued at LE1.783 billion, that are being implemented.

The joint committee's meeting comes as part of Egypt's efforts to revive its bilateral trade with its Arab neighbours.

Over the past six months, Egypt has taken part in six other joint committees with Tunisia, Syria, Morocco, Libya, Saudi Arabia and the Palestinian Authority.

Belgian bovine panic

Fears that Egypt had inadvertently allowed in infected meat products are unfounded, according to the government, which nevertheless has imposed a ban on Belgian beef. Mona El-Fiqi reports



Egypt has banned the import of Belgian beef for fear that it may be contaminated with the mad cow virus.

The ban, imposed on 3 July, came after European Commission findings that British beef, re-stamped to appear of Belgian origin, was illegally exported to Egypt and Russia.

Following the EC announcement, Egyptian officials launched an immediate effort to check the meat for possible contamination, and found that the illegal shipments posed no health risk to the population. The ban, however, remains in force.

In a bid to allay public fears, Ahmed Guweily, the minister of supply and trade, announced earlier this week that authorities at Egypt's various ports received strict instructions to check any meat shipments.

Over 2,020 tons of imported meat were checked by authorities over a period of 48 hours early in the week.

"All the meat shipments which entered Egypt were carefully checked," said Mohsen Saleh, general manager of the Supply Ministry's Meat Products Department.

"The ministry regularly carries out inspections to check the certificates of origin of all imported meat and to ensure that no contaminated meat products are sold on the Egyptian market," he added.

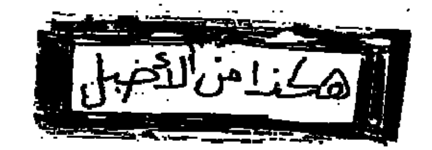
According to another Supply Ministry source who requested anonymity, Belgian meat imports to Egypt account for only 15 per cent of the country's total meat imports.

"The decree banning imports from Belgium does not mean that there are contaminated meat products on the Egyptian market," he said. "It is only to protect the market from any infected meat."

The government, in a similar bid to ensure public health and safety, last January imposed stringent restrictions on cattle imports from five European countries.

These restrictions came into place following reports by the Organisation of International Epidemics (OIE) indicating that cattle from Britain, France, Ireland, Portugal and Switzerland may be infected with Bovine Spongiform Encephalitis (BSE) — commonly kown as the mad cow disease.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**





Thank you Mr. President.

Your Excellency, President Hosni Mubarak

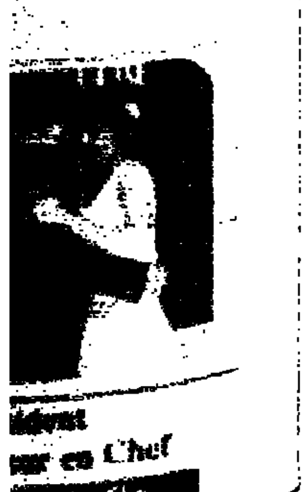
Thank you for paying a visit to our branch in Baden Baden during your last visit to Germany. Your visit to a branch of an Egyptian company in a European city inspite of your busy schedule reflects your keen interest in boosting Egyptian industry. Your visit had its impressive effect on the BTM and Marie Louis staff as well as on those engaged in the industrial field.

It is our promise that we will spare no efforts to endorse the Egyptian industry

Chemist/ **Louis Beshara**







Al-Ahram Weekly

Settlers out

Three weeks, and over 300 Palestinian injuries later, the clashes in Hebron continue, with each incident bringing the hope of an Israeli-Palestinian peace one step further away from reality.

Rather than attempt to curb the actions of the Jewish settlers in Hebron, Binyamin Netanyahu, instead, seems to condone the use Gestapo-like practices against a people who have been slighted, snubbed, attacked, slaughtered and occupied for nearly 50 years. And yet, it was Netanyahu who had argued for the need for security and peace.

Both these goals, however, will undoubtedly remain elusive so long as the Israeli leadership insists on embracing the most asinine and least pragmatic policies to be found and allows the settlers to remain in Hebron. These extremists are, in short, not just the match, but also the fuse and the gunpowder. Hebron is simply the powder keg.

Further fueling the fire are the rampant anti-Islamic attitudes on the part of the settlers and some members of the Israeli armed forces. What may have begun with a drawing, has been compounded by mutilations of the Qur'an and a string of other insults. Will concentration camps be the next step towards establishing the security the Israeli premier so desires?

Netanyahu shows little inclination to reverse these trends any time soon. In a frantic bid to remain in power, he has reshuffled his cabinet, seeking to scrape up the last of the credible supporters he may have before the majority of Israelis finally realise that he is leading them nowhere but towards another full-blown Intifada and the complete collapse of the peace process. In such a situation, mediation by either Egypt, the US or any other country is unlikely to bear fruit.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Chairman of the Board........ **Ibrahim Nafie**
Editor-in-Chief........ **Hosny Guindy**
Managing Editor........ **Hani Shukrallah**
Assistant Editor........ **Wadie Kirolos**
Assistant Editor........ **Mona Anis**
Layout Editor........ **Samir Sobhi**
General Manager for Advertising........ **Hassan Hamdi**

Al-Ahram Offices

Main office
AL-AHRAM, Al-Galaa St. Cairo.
Telephones: 5786100/5786200/5786300/5786400/5786500. Direct: 5786064
Telex: 20185/93346 Fax:5786089 /5786833
E-mail: weekly@ahram.org.eg

Overseas offices

USA
Washington DC: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, Suite 1258, 529 National Press Bldg, Washington DC 20045; Tel: (202)-737-2121/2122.
New York: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, 39th Fl., Chrysler Bldg., 405 Lexington Ave, New York, NY 10174-0300; Tel: (212)972 6440; Telex: 497 9426 ITT U.I.; Fax: (212) 286 0285.
Los Angeles: Soraya Aboul Seoud, 600 S. Curson Ave., 402 LA, CA 90036, USA; Tel: (213)-857-0941; Fax: (213)-857-7084.

Russia
Moscow: Abdel-Malek Khalil, Ahram Office, Kutuzovski Pro Dom 7/4 Kv. 50, Moscow; Tel: 243 4014/ 243 1424; Fax: 230 2879

Canada
Montreal: Mustafa Samy Sadek, Al-Ahram Office, 800 Rene-Levesque Blvd, West Suite 2440, Montreal H3B 1X9, Quebec; Tel: (514)876 7825 Fax: (514) 876 9262/ (514)876 7825.

United Kingdom
London: Amr Abdel-Samie, Al-Ahram Office, 203 - 209 North Gower street London NW1 2NJ
Tel: 0171 388 1155, Fax: 0171 388 3130

France
Paris: Sherif El-Shoubashy, Bureau Al-Ahram 26, Rue Marbeuf, 75008 Paris; Tel: (1) 537 72700; Al-Ahram F.; Fax: (1) 428-93963.

Germany
Frankfurt: Mohamed Eissa El-Sharkawi, Al-Ahram Bureau Friedrichstr. 15, 60323 Frankfurt, Tel: (069) 9714380/ (069) 9714381 Fax: (069) 729571.

Austria
Vienna: Mustafa Abdalla, 2331 Vosendorf Orts Str. 253; Tel: 692965/ 694805; Telex: 13 2726 GIGI A; Telefax: 694805.

Greece
Athens: Abdel-Azim Darwish, 69 Solonos St., Third floor, Kolonaki 106-79, Athens, Greece. Tel. and Fax :3634503.

Japan
Tokyo: Mohamed El-Dessouki, Duke Aoyama 4-11, Higashi 4 - Chome Shibuya - Ku, Room 402, Tokyo; Tel: (03) 340 63944; Fax: (03) 340 6625

Italy
Mustafa Abdallah [S.A.B. 2000] 00191 ROMA-V. Guido Bani, 34. Tel: 3332250 Fax: 3332294

Brazil
Rio de Janeiro: Ahmed Shedid, Cx. Postal 2395, CEP. 20001.

South Africa
Johannesburg: Mohamed Sabreen, Oxford Manor, 196 Oxford road-Northland 2116, Johannesburg. Tel.and Fax: (011)4477425.

Security with stability

Will the new rural rent laws dispose of the baby with the bathwater? **Mahmoud Abdel-Fadil** suggests alternatives

The appeal to reform landlord-tenant relations in the Egyptian countryside in essence aims to elaborate a balanced yet flexible formula for economic and social interaction between landlords and tenants so as not to prejudice or harm either party.

The new legislation that is being introduced toward this end focuses on three central issues. The first involves a redistribution of rent-generated income derived from the produce of agricultural land. The long-awaited modification of the "distribution of shares in the land" comes in response to the landlords' complaints that the relative value of their share in this form of income has dropped sharply due to the rising market prices of crops. The second issue pertains to the length of the lease and the conditions for terminating it. The third involves the conditions in accordance with which farmers or tenants can inherit the lease. Amendments in this regard seek to address landlord's complaints that current conditions for inheritance are too restrictive of their freedom to sell or cultivate their land as they wish.

The agrarian landlord-tenant relationship has important macro-economic and social implications, in contrast, for example, to the relationship between the butcher or grocer and the consumer, which functions on the micro-level of economic analysis. The new law governing the landlord-tenant relationship on agricultural land, therefore, merits our attention in terms of its ramifications upon development and social justice.

According to available statistics on property ownership of agricultural land in the mid-'90s, approximately a million feddans of agricultural land (about 13 per cent) are subject to the system of cash-based rent. Approximately half a million people (twenty per cent of the number of property title-owners) derive their livelihood from this land and they, in turn, support approximately three million people. The new law, therefore, affects a considerable segment of Egypt's rural population as well as the circumstances of cultivation and production of a large bulk of its cultivable land.

The new law, which permits landlords to repossess their land at the end of a five-year "adjustment" period, gives rise to a number of possibilities.

First, it will precipitate a recession in the rental market as a large portion of the land reverts to direct farming. The resulting increase in mechanised agriculture would generate high rates of unemployment among a large segment of farmers who had previously been tenants on the repossessed land. Not only will this affect the economic and social circumstances of the tens of thousands of farmers who will lose their deeds to the land, it will also rebound on the hired agricultural labour market, which the former tenants will be forced to join, whether on a permanent or seasonal basis.

A second possibility is that the land will be leased again in accordance with the provisions of the new law. This development will also be detrimental to the farmer/tenant who, under the former system, enjoyed a higher degree of economic and social autonomy. Under the new law, which introduces a variant of the crop-sharing system, farmers will be reduced to a version of hired labour, subject to the supervision of the landlord and responsible for a specific quota of crops.

Third, the new law will activate a movement in the sale of agricultural land, which had previously been blocked from circulation in the market. The ensuing reallocation of land, whether for agricultural or non-agricultural purposes, will effect both the levels of agricultural production and the configuration of crop distribution.

In view of the limited supply of cultivable land in general (and in the agrarian rent market in particular) in conjunction with the persistent rise in demand for this land, we can expect a steady climb in the rent value of agricultural land, once again skewing the balance between the costs of rent and the value of the net production per feddan of land.

To unleash market forces in the realm of the agrarian landlord-tenant relationship, and to refer property disputes to the provisions of civil law in this regard, overlooks the specific structural characteristics and economic ramifications of this market in Egypt. It is inappropriate to treat this market on the same footing as that of tomatoes or soft drinks. Therefore, if rents on agricultural land are to be deregulated, there should be some formula for specifying an equitable, proportionate distribution of shares in light of the net production value per feddan, after deducting the costs of production.

But perhaps the most important practical solution to resolve the dispute between agrarian landlords and tenants on a permanent and equitable basis is to establish an agrarian land fund. Such an institution, modeled along the lines of the Nasser Bank, can act as an intermediary between the two parties. The fund, which could be financed by a large loan offered by a consortium of commercial banks, would facilitate the sale of up to five feddans of land to the tenant farmers through a 20-year installment plan. At the same time, it would reimburse the landlord for the price of the land (calculated at three-quarters of the market value of the feddan). The landlord might also be offered the choice of receiving payment immediately or over a period of no more than two years in order to enable him to reinvest this money in other profitable assets.

In light of the new law, this solution offers the most realistic prospects of guaranteeing social security for thousands of people while achieving economic stability and growth.

The writer is a professor of economics at Cairo University.

The impending water crisis

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed argues that the statement made by President Chirac at the Earth II summit on the growing shortage of potable water could help redress the balance of power between Arabs and Israelis and eventually help salvage the Middle East peace process

The second Earth summit, held in New York a few days ago, was a total failure, the one exception being agreement between the participants on the gravity of the water shortage issue and the need for a concerted global effort to overcome the challenge. To that end, a world conference sponsored by French President Jacques Chirac will convene in Paris in March or April next year.

In his speech to the New York summit, Chirac stressed that the lack of sweet water worldwide is reaching a critical threshold. As consumption of water doubles every 20 years, drinking water available to Africans in the year 2000 will be one fourth of what it was in 1950; to Asians and Latin Americans, one third. Shortage of water is bound to become a major source of conflict at various points on the globe in the near future, lending new urgency to the 'pre-emptive diplomacy' line advocated by Boutros-Ghali.

What is worth underlining is that the shortage is over sweet water, not over water in general which, thanks to the oceans and the seas, is plentiful. In other words, one key issue that the Paris conference will have to address is how to desalinate sea water economically. The time has come to develop methods of making sweet water abundantly available by a variety of techniques, including developing new sources of energy. Solar energy, for instance, can help evaporate sea water which can then be used to irrigate deserts. With the help of genetic engineering, such techniques can help launch ecological engineering. Wide areas of desert can be made to bloom. Actually, the Paris conference should go beyond generalities on this matter and tackle concrete situations such as what could be done in a region directly bordering France, namely, the Mediterranean basin.

An idea I put forward in a book I wrote two years ago, *Peace or Mirage?*, was to make the growing crisis over water in the Middle East the central element in the search for a comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The idea grew out of conversations I had with top experts in the field, who told me that with the available technology, a three-row deep system of solar cells strung along the southern shore of the Mediterranean, from Morocco in the west to Gaza in the east, could harness enough solar energy to produce four times as much electric power as that now consumed by the whole of Europe. This led me to consider the possibility of devoting a part of that energy to evaporating the Mediterranean Sea and transforming it into a sweet water reservoir that could be used to turn the barren terrain of the Sahara desert and the Arabian peninsula into fertile green land. There is of course the danger that the evaporation process could bring about a substantial drop in the sea level, but that can be offset by increasing the inflow of water from the Atlantic Ocean through widening the Straits of Gibraltar.

I have been told that my proposal is mere science fiction. But, at a time Pathfinder is probing the surface of Mars, the admittedly huge technical difficulties in the way of translating my idea into reality cannot justify its dismissal out of hand. The same was said about the High Dam before Nasser launched the project 40 years ago; and today president Mubarak is dreaming of similar ecological surgery in Toshka.

An important factor which makes my proposal particularly timely is that it is not only an ecological project, but also a political one and a possible solution of both the Arab-Israeli conflict and, eventually, of the widening rift between North and South across the Mediterranean and a golden opportunity for job creation at a time unemployment is a growing source of dissatisfaction, frustration and widespread dissent and rebellion against the present world order.

When I first came up with my proposal, the peace process had not reached its present critical stage. Although even then it was the target of a great deal of criticism, there was at least a semblance of progress. Following Netanyahu's accession to power, this is no longer the case. While from the start I never suggested making Israeli technology the critical factor in the whole undertaking, today I would even propose that the project be initiated independently from Israel, eventually as part of the Arab Common Market strategy, a subject very much in the news these days.

What I suggested in my book was to count rather on Japanese technology, given that Japan is heavily dependent on Arab oil and, contrary to the US and Europe, relatively free from the pressure of Zionist lobbies. Another potential Asian partner is China, where water shortage is becoming an issue of growing concern. With Netanyahu's obstructionist attitude towards the peace process, France, particularly its president, and, to a lesser extent, the other EU countries, are displaying greater readiness to challenge Israel's settlement policy as counterproductive to peace. Only the US administration is still firmly backing Israel.

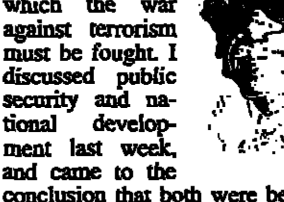
An undertaking of this magnitude will not be achieved overnight. That is why the political dynamics it will create are of greater relevance in the near future than its technological prospects. The project can be launched in cooperation with a number of international partners, from which Israel will be conspicuously absent, thereby striking a blow at Netanyahu's belief that he alone holds all the cards.

Israel has as much to gain from participating in the project as any other country in the Middle East. Contrary to the Arab countries, Israel's limited surface area does not make it a contributor of any significance as far as land exposed to the sun is concerned, but its technological know-how, notably in the field of harnessing solar energy, can be beneficial to all. In the final analysis, the political dimension of the project is to redress the balance of power between the protagonists and reduce the factors now standing in the way of a genuine peace.

The desalination of sea water has long remained a relatively low priority concern, because none of the technologically advanced nations were really interested in achieving a breakthrough. The greatest achievements so far have been realised in the rich but barren oil-producing countries of the Arabian peninsula. However, the cost of desalinating sea water remains very high (approximately $1 per cubic metre). But now that the problem has become a global one, and that technologically advanced nations are interested in finding a solution, one can expect not only to reap the social dividends of such a breakthrough, but also its political dividends.

Intellectual confrontation

By Naguib Mahfouz



There are three different levels at which the war against terrorism must be fought. I discussed public security and national development last week, and came to the conclusion that both were being dealt with satisfactorily. The third level on which the confrontation with terrorism is to be fought is a very important one: the intellectual level.

Terrorism is not only a criminal act. Certainly there is a criminal side to it, but it can also be based on ideological grounds, no matter how spurious or twisted. Until we deal with it intellectually, we cannot say that we have cured the phenomenon completely.

Many writers have tried to combat terrorism through articles in newspapers and magazines, but we must bear in mind that a majority of the radical youth are illiterate. It is sufficient to study the discussions held with some of those apprehended to realise that they are uneducated. The extremist movement understood this perfectly and made use of widespread illiteracy and ignorance, recruiting its followers in villages, mosques and schools, not through newspaper articles. I am convinced that it is up to the intellectuals to fight fire with fire. Television bears much responsibility in this matter.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

What price Doha?

Al-Mussawar: "The PLO's number two man, Abu-Mazen, has met [Israeli Minister of Infrastructure Ariel] Sharon and offered his support in Sharon's battle against [Foreign Minister David] Levy and [Defense Minister Yitzhak] Mordechai. Is this an excessive case of pragmatism, bordering on capitulation, or an attempt to break through the defences of the hawks in Israel? We shall have to wait and see. Sharon had always maintained his refusal to meet any of what he called the 'murderers' of the PLO leadership or to shake their 'blood-stained' hands. For its part, the PLO and the Palestinian National Authority in particular have always been ready to meet Israeli leaders. If anyone has climbed down from his position, it is undoubtedly Sharon. The move, however, will ultimately be assessed by its outcome."
(Mohamed Wahby, 4 July)

Al-Shaab: "Our children are in great danger. Their culture has become Western. They know Paris, London and New York better than Baghdad, Damascus and Khartoum... They prefer Western songs and have grown fond of Superman, Batman and the like. This phenomenon has many causes: school curricula, the foreign films on Egyptian TV and the Arab view of the West as a paradise... The West does not only propagate its culture in order to brainwash our children; it also seeks to exterminate them, as it did in Somalia, Iraq, occupied Palestine and Lebanon."
(Talaat Romeih, 4 July)

October: "Who will go to Doha with plans for joint projects between the Arabs and Israel? Will the Arabs go to Doha to offer their wealth to Israel so that it will gain in strength and boost its economy? Are the Arabs so eager to top the $5 billion that Israel receives from the US in official and unofficial aid and the thousands of millions it gets from the Jews of the US and Europe? Do the Arabs want to return from Doha with smiles, photos and statements about the bright future awaiting the Middle East in the wake of peace? ... What could Israel possibly give us and what will it take from us? To this question, I have no answer."
(Ragab El-Banna, 6 July)

Akhbar El-Yom: "I do not think that Netanyahu's apology will make the Islamic nations forget what Israeli fanatics have committed against their religion. Whoever drew up the atrocious posters and plastered them on the walls of Hebron was not acting alone, but is backed by a powerful trend capable of enforcing its jingoism and hatred... This Israeli trend represents the most abhorrent religious and racist fanaticism in history. Israel is playing with fire and could get its hands burnt."
(Ibrahim Saeda, 5 July)

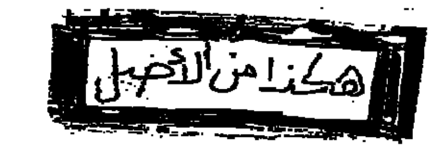
Al-Wafd: "It is stupid to hope that, through talking to Sharon, the chasm between the Palestinians and Israel will narrow. Sharon will never change his position, which can be summed up in the creation of Greater Israel... After meeting Sharon, Abu Mazen spoke of the cordiality of the encounter. Sharon, for his part, said that he draws the line between 'war criminal' Arafat and other high-level Palestinian PNA leaders, stressing that he would never meet Arafat. It is evident that the Palestinian leadership has no clear strategy and is embarking on haphazard uncalculated moves. They hope that such meetings will help them find a solution to the present impasse in the peace process, but they are really getting nowhere."
(Sanaa El-Said, 6 July)

Al-Ahram: "The issue of the economic summit in Doha comes at a time when we are fighting a battle of destiny with Israel. If it is held and Israel is invited to it, the decision to freeze normalisation with Israel will have been automatically annulled. Worse still, Netanyahu could decide to 'honour' the summit with his presence. He may even decide to address the summit and lecture us about peace. All we ask of Qatar is that it should not offend Arab feelings or behave as though it were an isolated island not linked to the Arab ocean. It should link the holding of the summit with progress or regression of the peace process."
(Nabil Khoury, 6 July)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**



In his meetings with world leaders, and especially with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Helmut Kohl seems completely confident and optimistic as far as the future of a united Europe is concerned. I gave him the features of a gentle polar bear: the snub nose, and the eyes which disappear where his shaggy eyebrows and round, jovial cheeks intersect. I exaggerated when sketching his hair, which is thick and shiny, as though fresh from a trip to the barber's. Maybe I really meant to give him a silver crown.



Close up

Salama A. Salama

Corniche carnival

Why did the government work so hard and spend so much to embellish the banks of the Nile facades only to abandon the newly beautified area to boat-owners, carriage drivers and itinerant vendors, who have managed to transform the Corniche into a chaotic marketplace where pickpockets and drug dealers move freely?

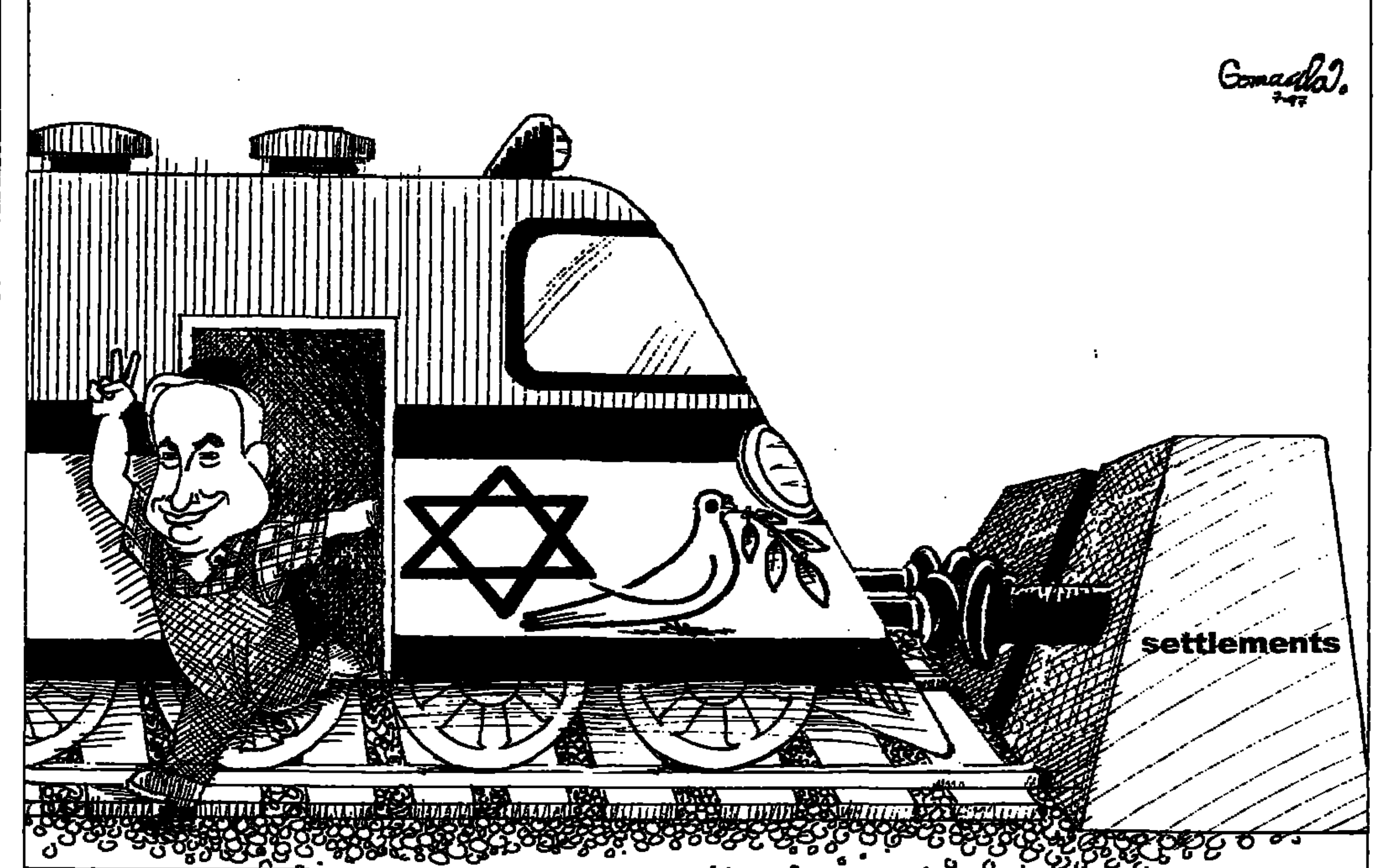
The yearly Nile flood is now a thing of the past. The level of the river has fallen, leaving bare large swathes of embankment. The Ministry of Irrigation has focused on making use of this supplementary land, a boon in the midst of a clogged and overcrowded city, by creating parks and flower beds, trees, and promenades extending the length of the Corniche, in order to pre-empt all attempts to build on or close off the banks. The privatisation of the Nile banks has had disastrous results elsewhere, and the ministry was keen to avoid a replay of the same old nightmare. The project, therefore, aimed at making these parks free public property, providing people whose access to the Nile has been closed off with green spaces, and preventing the collapse of the bridges which span the Nile.

In itself, the concept is brilliant. It restores some dignity to the river, and relieves it from the stifling constraints of the ugly cement buildings which *jostle for space along* its shores. The first phase of the project, executed under the late minister Abdel-Hadi Radi, covered the area opposite El-Andalus Gardens. Work is currently underway on the second phase, which will extend to the 15th May flyover in Zamalek.

Since the objective is to embellish the view of the Nile, not to make it ugly, it was expected that efforts at aesthetic improvement would be backed by the enforcement of regulations designed to enhance people's appreciation of beauty, order and civilised conduct.

Quite the opposite has in fact occurred. *This* area now poses a multifaceted problem at the traffic, environment, security and social levels. The most serious problem of all is posed by the hundreds of small boats that clog the Nile after midnight when they begin to shuttle back and forth between Qasr El-Nil and Abul-Ela bridges. Vulgar music is played at ear-splitting levels, and people not only picnic, but also cook in the open air, frying eggplant and *falafel* on the small stoves they have set up along the new Corniche. Inevitably, the joyous hubbub is rent, from time to time, by the raucous shrieks which accompany a fist-fight, and the explosions of firecrackers that shatter the sleep of those who live in the buildings overlooking the Nile.

Can Youssef Wali, under whose jurisdiction this project lies, find a solution? An environmental and educational garden for children could be created under the care, supervision and financial sponsorship of the Zamalek Society for the Development of Services. But something must be done to close down the marketplace on the new Corniche.



Soapbox

Not one world

What will be the future of national languages in a world dominated by capitalist globalism? Globalism is an objective reality, generated by the expansionist and competitive nature of the capitalist system. It also results from the hegemony of certain powers, particularly the United States, over scientific and technological achievements which eliminate geographical distance and political borders. The same powers seek to monopolise politics, economics, and culture, to serve their exploitative and expansionist policies. One language now dominates commercial and economic relations, imposing certain cultural values.

Protecting linguistic and cultural specificity does not mean rejecting the reality of our times or foregoing the fruits of scientific and intellectual labour. Rather, it means seeking to appropriate global achievements to satisfy our national needs, while making our own innovative contribution. Protecting our specificity does not mean isolating ourselves; rather, it means developing and transcending tradition creatively.

Despite the relative modernisation of the Arabic language, it is still incapable of fulfilling the needs of our societies and the requirements of development at both the human and production levels. In its terms and structure, language reflects the erosion, marginalisation and debilitation of our culture. We must work towards a cultural, scientific and linguistic renewal.



This week's Soapbox speaker is the editor of the quarterly journal Qadaya Fikria *(Intellectual Issues) and a literary critic.*

Mahmoud Amin El-Alem

Bulldozers of different kinds

The Palestinian Authority is grappling with the complexities of state-building, writes **Edward Said**. Meanwhile, the Palestinians themselves have discovered that the withdrawal of Israeli troops is only the beginning of a road which does not necessarily lead to democracy

While I was in London a few days ago I attended the annual fund-raising dinner for Medical Aid for Palestine (MAP), an important British charity that supplies medicine, training, and hospital equipment to Palestinians in Lebanon, the West Bank and Gaza. Most of the audience (and indeed many of the charity's supporters) was Arab generally, Palestinian in particular, but there was also a considerable British presence as well.

The two main speakers were Lord David Steel, MAP's current president, a former member of parliament and leader of the Liberal Party, and Clare Short, minister for international development in the New Labour cabinet of Tony Blair. Both are well-known supporters of Palestinian rights and, even though they spoke approvingly of the now defunct Oslo accords, were emphatic in lamenting the current state of affairs in which Palestinians continue to suffer the denial of their rights. The striking thing about both speeches, however, was the reference made by each speaker to the misuse of public funds by the Palestinian Authority. Steel and Short stressed the need for accountability and transparency, in effect saying that what is now a universally known aspect of the PA's rule should stop, given that Palestinians are an oppressed people still in need of financial aid and support.

These remarks came at a very difficult time for all Palestinians. Not only has the peace process worsened economic and political conditions in the Occupied Territories, but the extreme right-wing government of Binyamin Netanyahu has intensified the provocations and outright robbery which are the core of its settlement campaign. In addition, the US Congress — acting in accordance with its policy of being more unconditionally loyal to Israel than to any other country — has passed a resolution giving Israel total sovereignty over Jerusalem. There has been very little help to Palestinians from the Arab states, and internationally the cause of Palestine has lost a great deal *of its luster; there are, after all, many other problems* in the world.

Thus, it is entirely correct to say that Palestinians feel embattled and isolated: they are either forgotten refugees, or prisoners of Israel's occupation. But it would be entirely wrong to conclude that all their problems derive from their enemies. Some responsibility for the disastrous state of affairs must be laid at the door of the Palestinian Authority and its head, Yasser Arafat. When a report issued by his own internal auditors states flatly that 40 per cent of the Authority's budget has either been wasted or misused, it would be absurd to blame Israel, or to say that, since all Middle Eastern governments are corrupt and inefficient, why should we be any different?

Nor is it the case that Palestinian official malfeasance is an invention of the pro-Zionist Western media. Recently, the *Guardian*'s senior correspondent, David Hirst, a life-long sympathiser with the Palestinian tragedy and a first-rate reporter who has devoted his life to living in and writing about the Arab world, wrote a devastating report entitled "Shameless in Gaza" in the *Guardian* about the open corruption of the Palestinian Authority. He described the enormously ostentatious and expensive villas being built on the coast by Abu Mazen and Um Jihad, the company called Al-Bahr which, true to its name, swallows up property and businesses for Mr Arafat's interests, the nightclubs, luxurious limousines, and the commercial abuses of various high officials... all this against a background of 40 per cent unemployment in Gaza, the protracted misery of the thousands of camp dwellers, the total paralysis of the Palestinian economy, and the complete breakdown in any sort of advance in Palestinian rights.

When asked about all this in a more than usually disgraceful interview with *Newsweek*, Mr Arafat said it was not true, and that there was no money in the Authority, which he said is under the thumb of the donor countries for its budgetary activity. Every time *he was requested to explain an embarrassing aspect* of his regime (e.g. Daoud Kuttab's summary arrest and 10-day detention) he would either say that he had appointed a committee to look into it, or he would object to the questions by retorting "Do you realise that you are speaking to Yasser Arafat?" For not only does Mr. Arafat have no notion of proper governmental responsibility and accountability, he also believes he can fool everyone with his prevarication and bluster. No one needs to be reminded that Mr Arafat's word in the Territories is law; he is the Authority and very little can get done without him; he is the sole source of patronage, and only he knows the full scope of the budget.

We have now become an international scandal. In April, *Ha'aretz* published a 15-page supplement on the Authority's characteristic double-dealing. This year 1.5 billion shekels ($500 million) will be transferred from Israel into the PA's secret account in Israeli banks; this is referred to as "the second account", and comprises remittances on VAT taxes, import duties, and pension fund deductions paid by Palestinians which Israel returns to Arafat; but, since only he and assistants of his like Mohamed Rashid know the exact amounts and accounts, he is at liberty to dispose of this money basically to buy people's loyalty and complicity. In a situation of virtually no productivity and no public works, Arafat simply inflates the size of his bureaucracy and security forces, now totalling about 90,000 people, many of them without real jobs except for a title (750 directors-general of ministries, as an example) and a salary. To survive, Palestinians must become servants of a despotic tyrant who has nothing real to offer his unfortunate people except himself, more failure, more corruption, and mediocrity.

The really serious theft is the system of monopolies operated by Arafat and his cronies, including his ministers, their children, spouses, uncles and aunts. There are now monopolies on wheat, cement, petroleum, wood, gravel, cigarettes, cars, gasoline, cat*tle feed, and a few other commodities; all these com*pel the ordinary citizen to pay inflated prices several times greater than the price under direct Israeli occupation. A ton of cattle feed used to be 120 dinars; it is now 300 dinars. No one knows exactly how much money is made in this way, nor who gets it, nor how it is spent.

There are no laws for companies or investments, and consequently no requirement to register companies, to hold bidding competitions or to offer tenders. There is no way of regulating mortgages, no orderly routine for collecting debts, no law for recording joint companies. In such a deliberately chaotic situation, Arafat and his associates can do what they please with neither a legal system nor an aroused independent media to inhibit their appetites. Many of the security chiefs and their services are used for enforcement or extortion, and above all for threatening anyone who dares to object.

The results of all this are uniformly negative. No real development can take place, no institutions can develop, no prosperity can occur. When ministers and their assistants charge their home expenses to the Authority, own four cars, and insist on travelling first class, all this sits badly with a society that is still under occupation and for the majority of which life is extremely difficult. Besides, these are all abuses of public funds and the public trust. It demoralises and cheats people for whom the "peace process" from the beginning was a fraud and who are still entitled to yearn for justice and freedom.

During hard times, leaders are expected to set a high standard of personal conduct and commitment. In the Palestinian case, the tragedy of a dispossessed and militarily occupied people is compounded by a leadership that made a "peace" deal with its more powerful enemy, a deal that serves Israel's strategic purposes by keeping Palestinians, whose land has been practically lost to Zionist conquest, in a state of depression and servitude. The leadership of Yasser Arafat perpetuates, rather than alleviates this horror: he delivers security to Israel by punishing his own people, lying to them that he is bringing us nearer to self-determination, deceiving them into believing that he acts in their name and interests. With his corruption, he has stripped his own people of their resources, squandered their wealth, and abused their lives further. In the process, he is robbing his people, forcing them to accept monopolies, and allowing himself to be accountable to no one as he bribes, bullies, and corrupts everything in his way.

The fact is that, by his behaviour, Mr Arafat no longer represents the majority of Palestinians, and now survives without dignity by virtue of US, Israeli, and Arab support. He has no use for his people and, if they were free to say so, the feeling would be more than mutual. The cause of Palestine can only be served if he resigns. I said this right after the Oslo Accords were signed, and I am sorry to say that time has proved me right. Yasser Arafat has neither the vision nor the courage to lead anyone anywhere, except into more poverty and despondency.

Building before joining

An Arab common market is not a viable option, writes **Mohamed Mahmoud El-Imam**, until we deal with the preliminaries. Why should the Arabs integrate, and how, would be good questions with which to start

Suddenly, the Arab world is swarming with integration projects. After 40 years on ice, the concept of an Arab common market is being pushed into the limelight, albeit on a sub-regional basis. The idea is supported by Egypt and Syria, both members of the Council of Arab Economic Unity (CAEU) and the Arab Common Market (ACM), initiated in 1964. It includes Iraq, Jordan and Libya as well as the Damascus Declaration Group. Egypt seems to be extending free-for-all invitations to join a free trade area (FTA), to individual Arab countries, the EU (through the negotiation of an Association Agreements, within the Euro-Med initiative), and even to the US, which has proved quite reluctant to respond. The ACM, on the contrary, seems to be a more pessimistic expression of the Arabs' views on the so-called greater Arab FTA, resolved upon recently by the Economic and Social Council of the Arab League. But the final result means that Japan and many non-Arab developing countries *will not be invited to the* party, their economic ties with the Arab world left to be governed by the strong hand of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and its World Trade Organisation (WTO).

All these associations start with the establishment of an FTA, but where do they lead? Much of the confusion arises from the lack of differentiation between various types of regional integration. From a purely economic point of view, the main arrangement is a Customs Union, which is an FTA seconded by common external tariffs erected as barriers against other trading partners. This is considered "second best" to overall free trade as advocated by classical *economists, in the* sense that it goes half-way towards the "best possible" option: free trade for all. Its merit is that it widens the scope of free movement of goods and services from within a country to within a region, while maintaining outside customs at a reasonable level to safeguard members of the regional formation from the unequal relationships imposed by a world system of unequal partners.

But this is only temporary: it is a stop on the long road towards the ultimate goal of generalised, global free trade and integration. This is, more often than not, neglected to the benefit of simple FTA arrangements. It may be recalled that the European Community started by building its customs union, going beyond the FTA achieved in 1961 (four years after the Treaty of Rome). By 1964 (the date of the decision on the ACM), most of the Union had been formed, and an average tariff of 12.5 per cent was imposed on trade with the rest of the world. By 1970, trade among the six members rose to 54 per cent of total trade, compared with the already high initial level of 38 per cent, with a simultaneous increase in the members' share in total world trade. This ratio fell to 52 per cent in 1973 with the admission of Britain, together with two former members of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), Denmark and Ireland. The three moved together because of their close trading relationships.

The message is clear: one precondition for regional economic integration is the prior existence of close trading relationships. Freeing trade under such circumstances does not greatly disturb existing economic structures, but fosters more rapid growth and straightens out relationships with the rest of the world. Such a condition has rarely been present among groups of developing countries, the Arab group being no exception.

The other path of integration is essentially political, and is considered second best to immediate political unification. While a common political desire for unity may exist, jumping to political unity is very likely to intensify economic differences, which may produce social resistance among interest groups. The economic arena is considered the most suitable means of gradually creating awareness of mutual interests and a sense of community. But cultural bonds are a prerequisite for these developments.

The ultimate goal this time around, therefore, is regional integration, with the intention of paving the way towards unity. The fundamental question is: are cultural and social ties so strong as to sustain a drive towards unity? If so, it is reasonable to try building unity "by installments". Here again, the experience of the EU is enlightening. It was the initial feeling that there is much in common, both inside and outside the economic field, that made for the success of the endeavour. One cannot expect economic integration to lead to closer relationships, especially when there is a pronounced lack of "social cohesion". The cultural factor is important, but it must work in a dynamic fashion.

Close initial ties are necessary, but the ability to envisage a future of still closer and more fruitful relations is sufficient. Europe has enjoyed close cultural relations since ancient Greek times. But these relations must fit into a future dominated by a new civilisation built through coordination and cooperation. If the Europeans considered — as do the Arabs and many other developing countries — that integration would bring them closer to the dynamic civilisations developed in other parts of the world, there would be no point in spending much time and effort transcending economic integration to build a "European Community". This subjection to external civilisations is at the root of the failure of many efforts to bring about Arab and Third World unity.

In both economic and regional integration, the move towards the free movement of production factors (labour and capital), as well as that of goods and services, means a move towards a common market. If such movements precede the creation of a stable customs union, they will be disruptive, creating poles of attraction *to which both labour and capital will* migrate from needy and underprivileged areas — a phenomenon often observed at the domestic and international levels. Factor movements must not be considered means of rectifying structural imbalances originally caused by factor disproportionalities. On the contrary, they should help maintain the smooth functioning of a customs union in which all individual economic structures became viable.

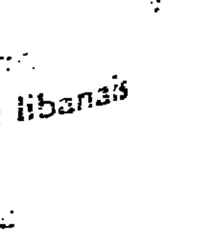
The supposed advantage of the Arab world in terms of such disparities in factor endowments is in fact an element hindering, rather than facilitating, integration. Capital and labour can be imported from anywhere, and any shortages should subside after a while. Gulf countries were reluctant to join the ACM, and refused to join FTA arrangements with other Arab countries since they did not want to be dragged into customs unions protecting industries in which they have little interest and which benefit them less than do imports from abroad. This has made the Arab region a unique case of large-scale and volatile factor movements; normal economic ties remain weak on the regional level, while they are quite intricate between the Arabs and the industrialised countries.

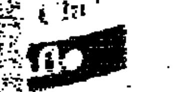
A market is an expression of the two major forces, supply and demand, and is not responsible for their creation. Supply depends upon production and, if sectors manufacturing producer and capital goods remain weak, this will expose the supply side of the equation to external influences. The demand side, on the other hand, depends on such factors as income levels. If, due to backwardness, income drawn from real production efforts, as opposed to rentier sources and transfers, is modest or negligible, especially for the poor majority, then markets must be built before they are freed.

The Arabs suffer from drastic food shortages and severe dependence on productive industrial goods, as well as foreign know-how. None of the proposed regional arrangements, particularly the plan for Middle Eastern regional economic cooperation, satisfies the conditions for viable integration. Instead of losing time in FTA ventures, whether regionally or internationally, the Arabs must rebuild their regional economy into an integrated, strong entity. This necessitates a new Strategy for Joint Action to replace the one formulated in 1980 and ending in 2000. This time, however, we would do well to implement such a strategy, instead of disregarding it.

The writer is a former minister of planning.





Samir Zaki: centre stage



Samir Zaki, who died on Sunday morning, did not tower, he soared. Those who tower have bulk. He had almost none at all. He soared, he was very imposing, but he totally lacked anything official.

He was the cool friend you turned to for advice in troubled moments. And as the general supervisor of the Cairo Opera House (Theatre Section), he must have had plenty of these moments himself. This position was specially created for him by Dr Ansari the chairman and general manager of the Opera House, in 1988 when he reached retiring age.

His cool was especially bland and seamless and of great assistance to anyone in trouble over ticket misplacement or the usual last minute contre-temps which afflict opera houses. Through earthquakes and mixed tensions of any kind, there he was at his post, directly stage-centre of the entrance spaces of the new Opera, bending slightly to his public ready with smiles and welcome — never false or condescending. He never was seen with a lost temper or a raised voice. For an opera house, this is a phenomenon indeed.

He was born in Cairo in 1933 and after studying law and graduating from Cairo University, he went to London and received the highest diploma from the London Polytechnic for Artistic Management in 1971. He joined the old Opera House as a public relations officer when he returned to Cairo, and was later made artistic director of the new Opera House. He had what opera houses need: manners, punctuality and warmth in dealing with people of all types and races.

He was twice married, first to an English woman then a Brazilian and has three children. His knowledge of opera was wide and sympathetic, but quietly sharp and pointed towards excellence. Many arrivals to the coming opera season will miss the presence of the towering elegant assistant to their night at the opera.

David Blake

Dreams of beauty

David Blake watches butterflies skimming the water

The National Ballet of Korea: Highlights from Swan Lake, Carmina Burana, Le Corsaire and Don Quixote; Cairo Opera House, Main Hall, 2 July

Pacific 1997, and a long spray crested Pacific roller flowed on to the Cairo Opera stage bringing enough balletic splendours to last several seasons. The Korean National Ballet had arrived at last, bringing with it complete justification for the pleasure principle — not to ask how or why, but just to enjoy. Leaving aside the word why, how becomes of the greatest interest.

The classics today, whether musical, dramatic or sung, are facing upheaval of a century after a period of total acceptance. What is just around the corner for all the arts of the theatre is causing many to shiver.

For the Korean National Ballet, founded in 1962, these problems hardly exist. They have such an elemental attack to their presentation it brushes aside all criticism. Such easy acceptance of the classical ballet's often imprisoning formulae means nothing. Their energy and warmth allows their hearts to take over. They have none of the doubts that the western ballet companies find when facing the effusions and baroque styles of the end of the last century.

The discovery of the floor of an opera house was no great advantage for the modern ballet. Dancers lie around on it, make love on it, live and die on it. These excesses have worn thin, leaving the so-called classical ballet as an elaborate mechanism which few choreographers these days wish to confront. Maybe the mechanism is all that is left of the classics. This is not the case with the Koreans. The entire company has a bird-like quality of elevation. You don't merely fall in love with the star ballerina for her jumps, you fall for the entire company. They each have an individuality, but fit perfectly into the whole with astounding cohesion.

The highlight treatment for Act 2 of *Swan Lake* was worked like a Swiss watch. The Koreans have great physical beauty like their director Choi Tae-ji. They have the a fine-edged elegance that comes from their own national dance style. They reproduce this in *Swan Lake*. As soon as they begin to dance, it is clear that the style is not Russian, not that of Petipa and Ivanov. Their physicality is entirely different. Russo-Western dance, all muscle and struggle, works and is exciting. The Russians have genuine heft, which keeps them aloft. The Koreans, on the other hand, are steely strong and totally assured in the most difficult technical feats. Everything is lightened, aerated and exact. Their timing is perfect. Everything about them is perfect: perhaps that could be their only trouble, too much perfection. But even this is avoided. They are warm, outside the purely athletic western style. Swans big and small showed exact timing, flying, fluttering feet and perfect points.

Nam So-yeon danced the Swan Queen with heavenly arms and deportment. She is quicker than her western equivalent: she darts, is suspicious, and hardly trusting of her prince. This gives her performance a new twist. Odette dances on, a sophisticated swan who may lose her man. We do not see the result of this slant on Odette because the highlight ends.

The prince was Kang Joon-ha, her Korean danseur noble. He was very aloof, no muscle man but a character caught up in a myth he does not understand. The celebrated *pas de deux* was cool and caught exactly the silent cinema manner needed but often rejected because it is beyond most dancers to achieve. Not so these two, whose magnificence of gesture suggested some lost world of beings beyond mortality.

Carmina Burana, which fell a bit flat, came after the dazzle, leaps, *entrechats* and sizzling turns of the *pas de trois* of *Le Corsaire*, in which the Koreans show-cased their idea of virtuosity. *Carmina Burana*, usually earthy and thick-set to fit Orff's music, was given as a dance highlight with some of the songs added. Popular with an audience who cares little for the ballet, this particular selection was chosen to accent the dance. The costumes were in subtle autumnal reds and the entire piece was performed in front of a construction suggesting the wheel of a very dark life. The Koreans performed it well, but they are best in the air and light and not in the shadows.

After *Carmina Burana* we had more of the virtuosity we saw in *Le Corsaire* in the mixed highlights of *Don Quixote*. This is a salad of a ballet; everyone has had a go at it, from Petipa to the present time. Ludwig Minkus, the mystery composer from Vienna, made this musical hodge-podge. We were in a garden, a bar, or a town square — it does not matter where — and there followed the usual big menu of divertissements. The Korean National Ballet put it all together as a party bouquet and the audience fed on treasures. The entire company was on stage to do their roles. Choi Kyung-eun as Kiri and her boyfriend Basil, danced by Lee Won-kook, led the rout.

So began the ending of this historic visit of the Koreans. Everything was immaculate, the dancers, their beautiful, expressive faces floating out of a sea of subtle colours — green and mauve — like old pressed flowers, slashed by yellows and Spanish reds and blacks. Such certainty: triple turns, double pirouettes sur place, positively threatening virtuoso certainties, nothing fazed or smudged. Lee Won-kook, an entirely black shadow person, sped through the air, covering the opera stage in a leap or two.

Who are these people? From what race of dancing spirits do they come? Choi Kyung-eun's beauty was a knock out. Such a face, arched neck, brilliant head turns, and feet sure as butterflies dancing over the water. Not often such things: Alvin Ailey, the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and these Koreans — dreams of romance. What does a mere audience do? As with Flamenco, jump on the seats and scream we love you. Better not jump on the seats, spare the Opera House, stand in your place and scream. Some did. This is dancing, the ultimate one word thing without a meaning.

Cinema

Home-grown apples

Tuffaha, Rafaat El-Mihi's most recent film, might seem a little more optimistic than usual, but nonetheless exhibits the director's usual concerns, writes **Mohamed El-Assyouti**

A happy couple gets married and goes off on a motorcycle ride. Their home is a room on top of the roof of an old building, overlooking El-Ataba, one of Cairo's main squares. Three months later, though, the wife, Tuffaha, is forced by her boss to undergo many medical check ups. These confirm that she is in perfect health, and fertile.

Her boss, who cannot herself bear children, then informs Tuffaha that she is to act as a kind of surrogate mother, a stand-in child-bearer for her own husband. Tuffaha is offered nothing in return for this nine month surrogacy, but is told that after the mission is complete she can return to her own husband.

In the mean time the latter, who works at a patisserie, is being pursued by a Greek woman, Janet, who has only a year to live. Both Tuffaha and her husband stubbornly resist these outrageous assaults on their pleasant conjugal life. When their resistance becomes physical they are charged with assault. The victims, of course, are represented by a phalanx of lawyers, and eventually the defendants, given the option of imprisonment or complying with the suggestions of Tuffaha's boss, opt for the latter. They divorce.

A year passes, during which it is not Tuffaha who gives birth but the two other women. Yet, curiously, the two children bear a striking resemblance to Tuffaha, and seem to have inherited none of their mothers' features. The happy couple reunites, and move into the now dead Janet's house to bring up her child.

This is the closest to a happy ending director Raafat El-Mihi has managed in the nine films he has written, directed and produced. And while *Tuffaha* is no less concerned with contemporary political and social dilemmas than any of El-Mihi's earlier films, exposing the vulnerability of the poor to the manipulation of those with power, it remains essentially optimistic, celebrating the resilience of those who are systematically marginalised by virtue of their lowly social position.

Sentimentality is avoided: the poor exist with two alternative relationships to power — either their identity is completely erased, fascistically liquidated, or else they are subject to genetic control, becoming obediently shaped pieces in the larger jigsaw. Tuffaha's boss prefers the former method of control, Janet the latter.

In the ministry where Tuffaha works she runs all the way up to the minister's office and bursts in during a meeting. She complains about the proposal of her boss, and the minister concludes that she has lost her mind. Tuffaha insists on wiping the official's desk, on top of which lies the central element of the frame, a photograph of Adolf Hitler. As she wipes the desk she drops the photo which the minister instantly catches and holds tenderly. When Tuffaha leaves, he replaces the photograph carefully, and tells his guests, one European, the other Asian, that the Nazis were right to eliminate the insane from society.

Janet, who only has a year to live, insists on a seemingly less aggressive manipulation of others' lives, attempting to integrate them in her own. Tuffaha retains singularity, however, surviving in the features of children that she has not borne.

The deliberate distancing of the audience from the events is typical of El-Mihi's style. His undermining of realist conventions, while it continues to raise critical eyebrows, did not, however, prevent *Tuffaha* from becoming the first Egyptian film to receive the Golden Pyramid Award at the Cairo International Film Festival.

El-Mihi's refusal to kowtow to received wisdom, while at the same time putting together a major production, should be lauded. And if many critics find themselves unsympathetic to his "non-realist" stand — choosing, predictably, to characterise it as non-Egyptian — they will simply have to accommodate themselves to the fact that El-Mihi continues to make his own films at a time when many other directors have either changed their styles to attract wider audiences or have quit filmmaking altogether. El-Mihi perseveres in enriching the crisis-stricken cinema industry with films that are consistent with his vision and style. A style, undoubtedly bizarre, but nevertheless capable of addressing contemporary, Egyptian issues.

In *Tuffaha*, as in many other of his films, Raafat El-Mihi pays homage to Egyptian screen classics by integrating pastiches of well-known scenes into the structure of his own, often fantastical plots. Such plots, fed by dialogue intended to sound cheap and commonplace, while simultaneously providing a witty commentary on events, appears to be far from lacking in box office appeal.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Valparaiso
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, Alexandria annex, 101 El-Horreya Avenue, Alexandria.
An exhibit of lithographs, postcards and photographs.

Adel Thabet (Oils & Pastels)
Doma Gallery, 20 Abdel-Aziz Gawish St, corner of Mohamed Mahmoud St, Borg El-Attebba', Bab El-Louq. Tel 355 8367. Daily exc ri, 12pm-10pm. Until 17 July.
Forty-five works displayed under the title "From Cairo to the Beaches".

Escalon
Zeinab Khatoun House, behind El-Azhar Mosque. Tel 340 7942. Open throughout the day. Until 17 July.
Works under the title Faces of The World.

Ahmed Mounib (Paintings)
Exhibition Hall, Al-Ahram Building, El-Galaa St, Boulaq. Tel 5786100. Daily 9am-10pm. Until the end of the month.
Landscape paintings under the title Dialogue Between Nature and The Artist.

Milton Glaser
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, American University in Cairo, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 15 Sept.
Posters and book covers, store designs and toy creations, magazine formats and logotypes are on display at the artist's first exhibition in the Middle East.

Collective Exhibition
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm; Fri 6pm-9pm. Until 20 Sept.
A retrospective display of works by Assem Sharaf, Dina El-Gharib, Hassaan Ali Ahmed, Hazem El-Mestekawy, Hisham El-Zeiny, Hussein Sharrife, Mohamed Abdel-Moneim, Omar El-Fayoumi and Sherif Abdel-Badie, all of whom held exhibitions at the gallery during the last season.

Suzanne Mubarak Children's Museum
34 Abu Bakr El-Seddiq St, Heliopolis. Tel 249 9915. Daily exc Mon, 9am-2pm.

Ahmed Mounib

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour El-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.
Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil and his wife, includes works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Rodin and a host of impressionist works, housed in the villa once belonging to the Khalils and converted into a museum with little, if any, expense spared. There are also a number of excellent orientalist works.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq, Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri, 8am-5pm; Fri 9am-11.15am & 1pm-3pm.
The world's largest collection of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic treasures, including massive granite statues and the smallest household objects used by the ancient Egyptians, along with, of course, the controversial mummies room. A perennial must.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11am & 1pm-3pm.
Founded in 1910, the museum houses a distinguished collection of Coptic art and artefacts, including textiles, manuscripts, icons and architectural features in a purpose built structure in the heart of the Coptic city.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab El-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.30am & 2pm-4pm.
A vast collection of Islamic arts and crafts including *mashrabiya*, lustreware ceramics, textiles, woodwork, coins and manuscripts drawn from Egypt's Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mameluke periods and from other countries in the Islamic world.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners. A state of the art museum housing the contemporary art of the state.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956), the Alexandrian aristocrat who is considered one of the pioneers of the modern Egyptian art movement.

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d. 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil Bridge, and whose Egypt Awakening became, somewhat belatedly, an icon of post revolutionary Egypt.

FILMS

Armenians in Egypt
Houssaper, Armenian Club, 43 Beirut St, Heliopolis. Tel 415 4909. 10 July, 9pm.
The documentary film is directed by Nabil Ezzat.

Basara: Princess Coh
Japanese Information and Culture Centre, 106 Qasr El-Aini St, Garden City. 10 July, 6pm.
Directed by Hiroshi Teshigahara (1992).

Indian Films
Maulana Abul-Kalam Azad Centre for Indian Culture, 27 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 392 5162.
10 July, 4.30pm: Naseeb
14 July, 4.30pm: Yarana

Indian Cultural Festival for Children
The latest Indian films for children, clay modelling, floor designs, kite making, yoga, Hindustani music, exhibitions, books, documentaries, dolls, and more at the Integrated Care Society, Heliopolis. Until August. For more information, contact the Information Service of the Indian Embassy, 37 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 392 5243/ 392 5162/3927573.

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

Ransom
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 1.30pm, 330pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. El-Horreya I, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Tel 452 9980. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, & 9pm. Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Haram, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Mel Gibson.

The English Patient
El-Horreya II, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Tel 452 9980. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. MGM, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Willem Dafoe and Juliette Binoche in the 9 Oscar awards-winning hit.

Sleepers
Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Robert De Niro, Dustin Hoffman, Brad Pitt and Kevin Bacon.

The Preacher's Wife
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm, & Thur-Sat, midnight. El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Whitney Houston.

Mars Attacks
Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight.
With Jack Nicholson, Glenn Close and Danny De Vito.

Romeo and Juliet
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Quite an impressive adaptation of William Shakespeare's dramatic language to a very contemporary setting, replete with black leather jackets and neon lights.

Last Dance
New Odeon II, as above. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Sharon Stone.

The Hunchback of Notre-Dame
New Odeon III, as above. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
Disney's animated adaptation of Dumas's classic novel.

Hassemni Ya...
New Odeon I, 4 Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
Fifi Abdou's play filmed and screened.

Toffaha (A Girl Called Apple)
Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm; Diana Palace, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Leila Elwi and Magued El-Masri.

Eish El-Ghorab (Mushroom)
Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10,30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm.
With Nour El-Sherif and Youssra.

Bekhit Wa Adila II (Bekhit and Adila II)
Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Adel Imam and Sherine.

MUSIC

National Arabic Music Ensemble
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 10 July, 9pm.
The ensemble performs selections from the classical repertoire in the manner of a traditional takht.

Circus Show
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, as above. 11 July, 8pm.

Jazz Concert
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, as above. 13 July, 9pm.
Salah Ragab and his Cairo Band perform.

Folkloric Dances and Music
Open Air Theatre, Opera House, as above. 14 July, 9pm.

THEATRE

Le'b 'Eyal (Children's Play)
George Abiad Hall, National Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 7783. Daily 9.30pm.
With Mona Zaki, Khaled El-Nabawi and Rania Farid Shawqi.

Mama America
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, Qasr El-Nil St. Tel 575 0761. Wed & Thur 10pm, Fri 8pm.
Starring and directed by Mohamed Sobhy.

'A'elat Wanis (Wanis' Family)
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, as above. Sat & Sun, 10pm, Mon 8pm.
Directed by Mohamed Sobhy and starring all the family members of the televised series.

El-Zaim (The Leader)
El-Haram Theatre, Pyrmids Road, Giza. Tel 386 3952. Daily 10pm; Fri & Mon 8.30pm.
With Adel Imam.

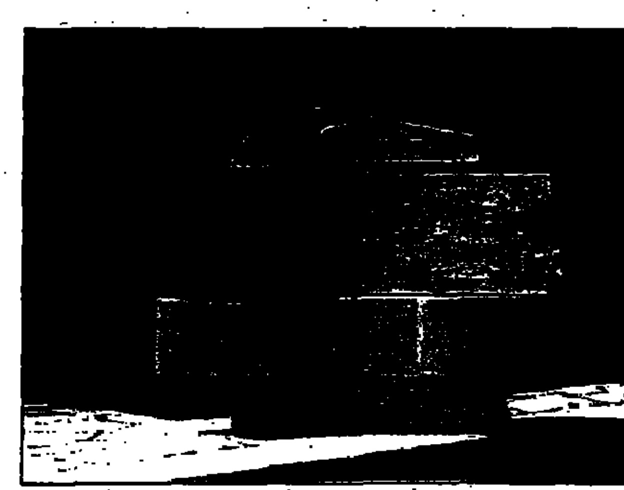
Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinet Nasr Theatre, Youssef Abbas St, Nasr City. Tel 402 0804. Daily 10pm; Fri & Mon 8.30pm.
A large crowd including Mahmoud El-Guindi, Mimi Gamal and Ashraf Abdel-Baqi.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.

Please telephone or send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo.
Tel 5786064.
Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by ***Injy El-Kashef***

Around the galleries

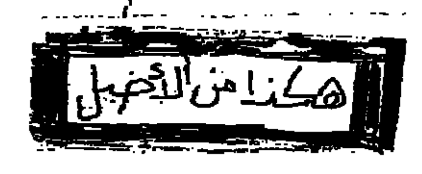


Hamdi Ateya

CERAMIC sculptures, over 20 by **Hamdi Ateya**, are on show at the **Mashrabia Gallery**. Ateya plays competently with mass, cleverly articulating the structures of his sculptures in forms that are consistently experimental and determinedly fly in the face of convention.

The **Centre for International Cultural Cooperation** is currently showing 34 paintings, watercolours, ink drawings and collages by **Mustafa Ebeid**. These are mostly abstract expressionist in style and show a mastery of material and technique.

Reviewed by ***Nagwa El-Ashri***



Conferring on status

Can UN conferences be fun? **Mona Anis**, in Paris to attend the UNESCO World Conference on the Status of the Artist discovers, surprisingly, that they can

Writers are unable to deny the lure of the nation, its tides in our blood. Writing as mapping: the cartography of the imagination. (Or, as modern critical theory might spell it, Imagi/Nation). In the best writing, however, a map of a nation will also turn out to be a map of the world.
Salman Rushdie

UN conferences seldom turn into exciting cultural events. The UNESCO *World Congress on the Implementation of the Recommendation Concerning the Status of the Artist* (forget the title for the time being), held in Paris between the 16-20th June was different, at least in as much as it succeeded in providing, alongside the usual UN deliberations, a lively forum for intellectual debate and a rare opportunity to view the latest artistic experiments in the visual arts, thanks largely to the Parallel Encounter and Information Forum set up *in the various* exhibition halls of the UNESCO which allowed artists and representatives of artists' organisations and associations participating in the congress to show their works.

The opening session, with musical and dance performances, was itself quite an event. Besides inaugural speeches by Federico Mayor, director-general of UNESCO, the representative of the French Minister of Culture and Javier Perez de Cuellar, former UN secretary-general and currently President of the World Commission on Culture and Development, five distinguished artists representing five artistic genres were invited by UNESCO to address the congress: musician Yehudi Menuhin, novelist Nadine Gordimer, poet Adonis, dancer Mallika Sarabhai and visual artist Dani Karavan.

While Yehudi Menuhin made an eloquent plea for greater respect for diversity and plurality of voices — the source of harmony in music — and the need for what he called "the harmony of diversity" in culture if artists are ever to combat the threat of the dominance of only one voice, *that of warmongers and profit*, Nadine Gordimer made an equally moving speech about the role of the artist in society, explaining that though propaganda is not the artist's cause, artists still have a responsibility towards society and the defence of human freedom.

"The defence of poetry is inseparable from the defence of freedom," said Gordimer, quoting Octavio Paz. And drawing on her experience in the struggle against the defunct apartheid regime in South Africa, she stressed: "Art was at the heart of the revolution, art is at the heart of reconstruction now."

Dani Caravan, from Israel, made an overtly political speech about the difficult peace between the grandsons of Ibrahim, and talked about the monument he and a number of Israeli artists had erected in the Garden of UNESCO headquarters in Paris dedicated to Yitzhak Rabin as a "symbol of tolerance." In marked contrast to the Israeli artist, the Syrian poet Adonis argued for an art capable of ridding itself of ideological politicisation and for a pure spot in the universe far from "the machinery of the *political* nonsense of regimes and powers."

I have to admit that I found Adonis's avoidance of the culturally specific slightly disappointing, as I thought that, like Yehudi Menuhin and Nadine Gordimer, and unlike Karavan, Adonis could have echoed a more culturally specific note without transgressing the line separating political sloganeering from the politics of culture. It was a pity he did not.

For the two days following the inaugural session, the deliberations of the congress were contained within three plenary sessions with round tables comprising panels of distinguished artists and the representatives of major art and art-sponsoring institutions. The themes of the three round table discussions were respectively: "New alternatives for financing art and creation: public and private funds," with the director of the Getty Conservation Institute, the director of the National Fund for Culture and Arts in Mexico, and the head of Patronage Activities in the Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations of France among the panelists; "Art teaching," with the ministers of culture of Romania and Ivory Coast, the President of the International Society for Music Education and Nadine Gordimer among the panelists; and "New technologies—new horizons for artists," with the curator of the Guggenheim Museum, the president of the French group Art 3000 and art historian Frank Popper among the panelists.

Against a marked tendency to substitute state funding of the arts with corporate sponsorship it was reassuring to hear, during the round-table discussions, the sobering voice of Nadine Gordimer warning that art must be kept away from business. She explained how disconcerting she found the now fashionable slogan that 'art is good business.' "Art is not good business," she argued passionately "and the Picassos and Shakespeares of the world, the works of whom are profitable to business, are the exception that proves the rule."

The work of the congress, during its last three days, was carried out in four commissions sitting simultaneously, respectively addressing the themes "The socio-cultural environment of authors, artists and performers"; "Authors, artists and performers *and the economic situation at the* end of the 20th century"; "Training and work" and "The protection of intellectual property rights in the digital era."

To return to the full title of the congress — Congrés mondial sur l'application de la Recommendation relative à la condition de l'artiste — the main aim of the gathering in Paris of all those artists and representatives of arts' institutions and associations, at least from the point of view of the UNESCO,. was to review the progress made in the improvement of the status of artists since UNESCO's General Conference, at which a recommendation on the status of the artist was adopted, was held in Belgrade in 17 years ago. According to UNESCO, the 1980 recommendation "was particularly useful in mobilising artists' organisations and associations, and gave rise in Canada, for example, to a law protecting the status of artists. Similar laws are in preparation in other countries (Argentina, Belgium, Russian Federation)."

In organising the Paris 1997 event, UNESCO was hoping that the deliberations of the congress would result in recommendations paving "the way for new approaches to guide public and private decision-makers and the artists themselves in their choices." Whether such hopes will materialise remains to be seen.

A pure place on the face of the universe

We all know, and some of us repeat incessantly, that modern life is but a tight system of shackles, a system based on manufacture, consumption in the market and division of labour, a division that itself might, in the foreseeable future, become one between machines *and not human beings*.

Most of us attribute such characteristics of modern life to scientific development, arguing accordingly that the most accute facet of what we term the crisis of modernism is inherent in science...

Science, the prime engine of development is incapable of providing an answer to the multitude of problems facing modern man. Science, unlike literature and art, does not create symbols, though it creates meanings and significations...

Demographic explosion, epidemics, *pollution, violence, marginalisation* and expulsion — those are the new faces of modern slavery, imprisonment and dependancy.

With these new worries overshadowing our present, one wonders whether art can really illuminate a new horizon with a light that science and philosophy, let alone politics, are incapable of providing... I pose this question because I believe that amongst all means of expression, art is the deepest, most comprehensive and most rooted in the human soul. Art is also the speech of the self inhabited by the other...

Our modern age needs to be civilised anew, and this can only happen once modern man begins to practice art as a world-view, *one that does not exclusively* pertain to the aesthetic but encompasses science, philosophy and all aspects of modern society, politics, economy, culture and values. All the questions which disturb modern life must be considered anew in the light of such an entwining between art, science and technology. Naturally, the art I mean is that capable of ridding itself from the plague of the easy option, of the passion of market and marketing and of ideological politicisation. ... An art tamed by the laws of the market follows a narrow course, *praising the present as it becomes a pris*oner of that present and thus loses its identity and its role... Art, from this perspective, is not limited to writing or painting but is an epistemological view that harks to the world while the world ventures on creating its new image. Thus art becomes a phenomenon that encompasses the whole of existence while being at the same time an aesthetic for that existence. This aspect of art must be stressed as art now faces a war of a new nature, a war that goes beyond the wars of forms and meaning: war where its very own existence is threatened by extinction so that the arena would become totally dominated by machines — the mechanics of the everyday in the domain *of technology; the mechanics of political* nonsense in the domain of power; the mechanics of descriptive nonsense in the domain of the media. Faced by these threats, creative people... must be aware of their role and that of art; it is not enough to criticise the world, but to lay the foundations for brotherhood amongst all human beings on the one hand, and a brotherhood with all that is mysterious and infinate in the universe...

Rimbaud once said that we have to be absolutely modern. I say we have to be absolutely poets and artists.

*Art enhances the uniqueness of the hu*man individual. It lays the foundation of love and all that revolves in the orbits of love. In our present polluted universal map, art is the only spot where one can breath pure air.

Excerpts from the speech given by Adonis at the inaugural session of UNESCO's World Congress on the Status of the Artist.

Excerpts from the preamble of the final declaration issued by the World Congress on the Status of the Artist

We artists, authors and performers of all regions, brought together by UNESCO with the help of its partners, within the framework of the world congress on the application of the recommendation concerning the status of the artist, reaffirm, on the eve of the third millennium, that artistic creativity is... a precious and inexhaustible human resource...

We recognise that within the context of the considerable changes which mark the evolution of... society, culture in general, and in particular artistic creation, represents a determining factor in the preservation of the identity of peoples and the promotion of a universal dialogue.

Thus, we are fully conscious of the essential contribution which can be made by art and artists to a better quality of life, to the development of a human face for each society and to the progress of tolerance and just peace in international relations.

Consequently, we proclaim that in order to encourage creation, the protection of artistic works and activities should be *founded on the application of human* rights and on seeking the individual and collective well-being of the inhabitants of this planet.

In this spirit, we are aware that the tendency to uniformity in modes of thought and cultural productions which often result in criteria based on immediate and/or maximum profit, constitute a real danger. On the other hand, we greatly appreciate the growing interest of the private sector with regard to the encouragement of creation, particularly when this helps to avoid the loss of creative talent through lack of means.

With regard to existing cultural policies, we are pleased by: the adoption by many member states of the constitutional, legislative and regulatory measures inspired by the UNESCO recommendation concerning the status of the artist, adopted 1980, which thus opened the way and set an example even in difficult economic situations; by the growing decentralization in many countries of responsibilities to communities at the territorial level; with international, regional and sub-regional collaboration which has been reinforced and which can still grow.

We are convinced that artists should be associated with the elaboration and execution of national cultural policies, in or*der both to follow the evolution of their* status, not in the sense of undeserved privilege, but in that of equality with fellow citizens.

In fact, no cultural policy can succeed without the support and active participation of creators and artists.

To this end, it is particularly important that professional organisations be encouraged and that the mechanisms for concertation should be established where they do not yet exist... Information through the media constitutes one of the principal means of democratising access to art and awakening interest in artistic activities.

The new technologies facilitate exchanges and render them quicker, easier and wider. They themselves constitute a vast field of research for artists in terms of the potential which they provide in favour of creation. At the same time, they raise questions on the future of certain forms of artistic expression and concerning respect for established rules.

It results in a call for a law in order that the artist be better protected and for works of art to be preserved in their integrity.

Because today's society is already a society of information and creativity, it is up to the artists, facing the future, to draw *up the ways for a new alliance between* the ethical, the technical and the aesthetic.

The future of society depends to a large extent on listening to the artist, in other words, on his status.

Books

The eyes have it


Mahmoud El-Wardani reviews some of the more significant titles to have appeared in the previous month

• ***Ain*** **(Eye), ed Adel El-Siwi, issue no 1. Cairo, 1997**

This appearance of this new journal dedicated to the plastic arts constitutes something of an event. To start with, it is the only periodical dedicated to the plastic arts on the market — previous attempts have invariably petered out after one or two issues. Furthermore, *Ain* (Eye) has set itself the highest production standards, and the result is a volume that it is positively pleasurable to handle and peruse.

In the editorial, Adel El-Siwi sets out the objectives of the periodical: to provide a forum for "the culture of the eye" as opposed to "the culture of words", to discuss the artist's problems and provide a space for relevant artistic criticism. Yet *Ain* does not confine itself to the visual arts, and in making room for articles on literature, the volume emphasises the interconnectedness of the arts.

"The Egyptian Section" of the volume comprises a study by Adel El-Siwi on the image of the body in Egyptian art and a report on a round-table discussion between artists, critics and writers on the crisis of the plastic arts in Egypt. There is also a dossier on prominent artist Mounir Canaan and a valuable study about the prolific but neglected engraver Nahmia Saad, who died of tuberculosis at the Helwan Sanitarium in 1945. In this section, *Ain* also reports on the results of a poll it conducted among 17 intellectuals, academics, politicians, film-makers and critics about the influence of the plastic arts on them.

As to the "Arab Section", this contains an article by Al-Baqer Moussa about the visual arts in Sudan, a personal testimony by Sudanese artist Hassan Sherif as well as a reading of the works of another Sudanese artist, Mohamed Omar, by the poet Adonis. The international section of *Ain* brought together a study of Juan Miro by Ahmed Mursi and a translation of an article by Tom Wolfe, among other fare. In the section entitled "Intersections", we find an article by Samia Mehrez on the visual element in Yehia El-Taher Abdallah, a translation of Umberto Eco's article on "the television experience", and an article by Yehia Haqqi about the Sultan Hassan Mosque, among others.

• ***Khitab Al-Afandia Al-Igtimai 1899-1914*** **(The Social Discourse of the Effendis 1899-1914), Zakari Lockman, tr Bashir El-Siba'i. Cairo: Dar Misr Al-Arabiya Lil-Nashr Wal-Tawzi', 1997**

Through careful study of the period between 1899 and *1914, the author analyses the social and cultural* transformation of the workers' movement in Egypt. Starting from the mid-nineteenth century, foreign-funded investments in Egypt offered employment to growing numbers of workers in large-scale, modern projects. The nascent working class soon developed an awareness of the exploitative conditions under which they operated, and this led to the formation of syndicates to defend workers' rights.

• ***Waqaat Al-Sultan Al-Ghouri Maa Selim Al-Uthmani*** **(The Battle between Sultan Al-Ghouri with Ottoman Sultan Selim), Sheikh Ahmed Al-Rammal Ibn Zonbol, ed Abdel-Moneim Amer.** ***Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation, 1997***

In 1517 the army of the Ottoman Sultan Selim II defeated Mameluke Sultan Qansowa Al-Ghouri's army. Thus began a new era in the history of Egypt and Islam. The author, Sheikh Ahmed Al-Rammal Ibn Zonbol, witnessed these events from a unique vantage point. As soothsayer to the Mamelukes, he would be called upon before every battle. It is therefore as an insider, privy to state secrets, that he writes. And his chronicle of the Mamelukes' barbarities, their schemes and their ultimate defeat makes scintillating reading.

• ***Al-Asr Al-Dhahabi Lil-Yahoud Fi Misr*** **(The Golden Age of the Jews in Egypt), Mohamed Mustafa Abdel-Nabi. Alexandria: Dar Al-Sadiqan Lil-Nashr Wal-Ilaan, 1997**

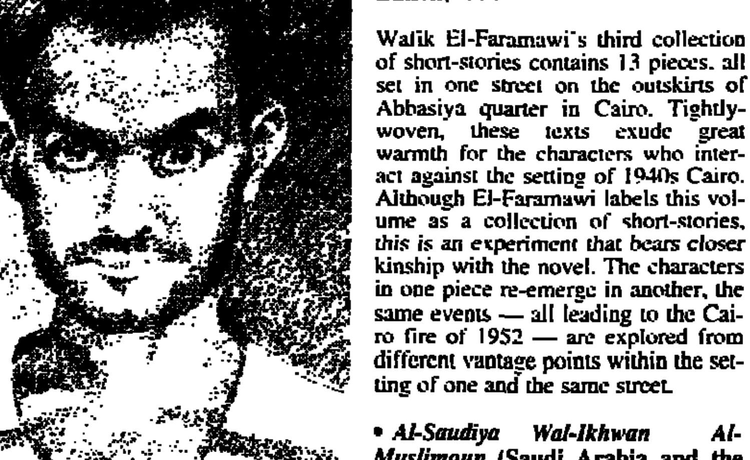
This study of the economic activities of the Jewish community in Egypt in the first half of the twentieth century is based on the researcher's 1995 MA thesis. The book sheds light on the relationship between the Jewish community and the key figures in Egyptian economy, offers profiles of Jewish families that attained prominence in the world of business and provides *charts* of the companies and banks they founded.

• ***Kharait Lil-Mawg*** **(Maps of the Waves), Siham Bayoumi. Cairo: Dar Al-Hilal, 1997**

In this, Siham Bayoumi's first novel, Cairo with its unique architectural heritage is not so much the setting as a force. The heroine, an architect, not only explores the architecture of the city but also charts the architectonics of human relationships in the metropolis, throwing into relief the intersections between human and urban identity.

• ***Said Misr Fi 'Ahd Al-Hamla Al-Frensiya 1789-1801*** **(Upper Egypt at the Time of the French Expedition in Egypt), Nabil El-Sayed El-Toukhi. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation, 1997**

This book is a first in that it is devoted to charting the French expedition in Upper Egypt: hitherto, the myriad studies on the French in Egypt have contented themselves with chronicling the expedition from its disembarking in Alexandria, through its conquest of the Delta to its arrival in Cairo, with only a few scattered references to its presence in Upper Egypt. Nabil El-Sayed El-Toukhi first gives an overview of conditions in Upper Egypt, analysing the political roles of such local figures as the village sheikh as well as of civil servants. He then gives a painstaking account of the many battles between the colonising forces and the locals as the French expedition progressed south of Cairo. In the final two chapters, El-Toukhi charts the administrative and economic conditions in Upper Egypt after the French conquest and traces the respective positions of the Mamelukes, peasants, Bedouins and Copts towards the French.


Mahmoud Said

• ***Misbah Al-Ladhat*** **(Lantern of Pleasures), tr Mohamed El-Lozi. Cairo: Al-Hayaa Al-Aama Li-Qusour Al-Thaqafa, 1997**

While classical Persian poetry has been translated into most languages, its modern Iranian counterpart has yet to be accorded the same treatment — an imbalance that Mohamed El-Lozi, the translator of this anthology of Iranian poetry, seeks to redress.

• ***Rawh Al-Rawh*** **(The Essence of the Soul), Wafik El-Faramawi. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation, 1997**

Wafik El-Faramawi's third collection of short-stories contains 13 pieces, all set in one street on the outskirts of Abbasiya quarter in Cairo. Tightly-woven, these texts exude great warmth for the characters who interact against the setting of 1940s Cairo. Although El-Faramawi labels this volume as a collection of short-stories, *this is an experiment that bears closer* kinship with the novel. The characters in one piece re-emerge in another, the same events — all leading to the Cairo fire of 1952 — are explored from different vantage points within the setting of one and the same street.

• ***Al-Saudiya Wal-Ikhwan Al-Muslimoun*** **(Saudi Arabia and the Muslim Brotherhood), Mohamed Abul-Asaad. Cairo: Markaz Al-Dirassat Wal-Maloumat Al-Qanounia Li-Huqouq Al-Insan, 1997**

This book poses the question of whether or not a relationship exists between the Brotherhood group operating in the Arabian Peninsula from 1912 to 1931 and the movement of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt from 1928 to 1949.

• ***Mahmoud Said: Miat 'Aam Min Al-Ibdaa*** **(Mahmoud Said: A Hundred Years of Creativity), Esmat Dawestashi. Cairo: Al-Hai'a Al-Masriya Li-Qusour Al-Thaqafa, 1997**

Alexandrian artist Esmat Dawestashi's monograph is published on the occasion of the centenary of the birth of Mahmoud Said. Among the setbacks facing any biographer of pioneer of modern art Mahmoud Said is that he left no diaries or memoirs, his only legacy being his paintings. Dawestashi uses the device of having Mahmoud Said recount his biography, from his privileged childhood to his father's forcing him to study law, to his resignation after 25 years in court in order to devote himself to his artistic vocation.


Plain Talk

At the risk of repeating myself, I am harking back to my recent visit to Philadelphia and my many meetings with the professors of *Pennsylvania* University for which I have developed an enthusiasm — as I have for Philadelphia itself. The many pamphlets published by the university, testimony to its excellent public relations staff, tend to highlight the intimate link between the university and the city in which it is located.

Philadelphia is certainly a city with character. I have visited quite a number of states and cities in America, and, to my mind, Philadelphia stands out. To begin with, it is a city with a long history, long, that is, within the American context. It came into being in 1681, almost one hundred years before the creation of the United States of America. Philadelphia played a proud role in the war of independence. It was in Philadelphia that both the Declaration of Independence and the American Constitution were signed. It was, moreover, the capital from 1790-1808. When in 1776 the Declaration of Independence was signed in the city, Philadelphia at the time was "the metropolis of the American continent, the principal port of the colonies and, with about 30,000 inhabitants, after London the second capital of the English-speaking world," writes Professor Mayerson. No wonder there is such a strong sense of civic pride in Philadelphia, one that the city's detractors prefer to refer to as vanity.

"Proper Philadelphia," E Digby Baltzel wrote in *Class of 1939 Philadelphia Gentleman:*, "was... the *host to the New World*'s most sophisticated and talented leaders. A class of gentlemen steeped in the classics as well as the political theory of Locke and Rousseau, reluctantly had taken the lead in rebellion against the British Empire, and subsequently wrote the new nation's constitution after a lengthy deliberation on Philadelphia's Independence Square."

Benjamin Franklin, the founder of the new city, was responsible for establishing its intellectual institutions. It was thanks to him that the Library Company of Philadelphia, the American Philosophical Society and the College of Philadelphia, came into being.

Franklin also played a leading role in establishing the Academie and Charitable School of the Province of Pennsylvania, which eventually became the University of the State of Pennsylvania. That was in 1779. At a later date, reference to the state was dropped and it became known as the University of Pennsylvania — commonly referred to as Penn. There was great disappointment when the capital was moved to Washington. The house which was to become the president's residence was purchased by the university trustees in 1800 and became the second home of the university.

For a long time Philadelphia claimed more newspapers and magazines than New York. While New York had in the early 1800s seven daily newspapers, *Philadelphia* had eleven. According to Professor Mayerson, "in 1823 there were four times as many printers as clergymen (in Philadelphia) and almost as many bookbinders as brickmakers."

No wonder the university is the first landmark in the city to be shown to visitors. In May 1976, upon receiving an honorary doctorate, President Valery Giscard d'Estaing said: "This is the university that added to its traditional curriculum such subjects as applied mathematics, foreign languages, political science and economics — all very new at the time. This is the university that introduced multi-disciplinary education well before the term was even invented... For all these reasons the University of Pennsylvania has been a true pioneer, and as we look back today it is virtually impossible for us to estimate the contribution this institution has made to free intellectual development."

Mursi Saad El-Din

Picturesque, practical and private

Neither the palm trees of the oases nor the tamarisks sprouting hardily on the fringes of the desert represent adequate building materials, writes **Fayza Hassan**; but Islamic architecture has made extensive use of timber, especially in the elaborate lattice-work filling the windows of mosques, palaces and bourgeois homes





Variations on the *mashrabiya* theme

Photos: courtesy of Ahmed Abdel-Gawwad

The factors which have governed the architecture of the typical houses of Islamic Cairo are "partly climatic, partly social and partly religious," according to Martin S Briggs (Mohammadan Architecture in Egypt and Palestine, New York, 1974).

The main characteristics of this climate-friendly architecture can still be seen in the few preserved old houses, featuring an open *maq'ad* (sitting room) facing north, a *malqaf* or wind-catcher, and "unglazed frames filled with *mushrabiya* (ornamental wooden lattice-work)" instead of glazed windows.

Fountains and wells in the open courtyards satisfied the endemic need for cold water, as did the well-ventilated shelves built in the *mashrabiya* windows on which the water clay jars were placed to cool. Though it is from this particular function that the celebrated windows have derived their name, they have always tended to conjure up images of women's seclusion, a practice known to have been quite common in all Mediterranean countries but mainly linked today to the Middle East: The necessity to protect the privacy of the household from the view of strangers caused the "windows [to be] placed so high up in the wall, that even a passer-by on camel back [could] not see within, and the *mushrabiya* bays and windows above allow[ed] the women to see out while not becoming visible themselves," writes Briggs.

The delicate decorations of the *mashrabiya* windows were one of the most picturesque details in the architecture of Cairene houses, which generally displayed an extremely bare exterior with one side only facing the narrow alley. A typical house had the lower part of its external wall faced with lime-stone: the upper part was of "lighter construction, usually of brick-work filled in between wooden posts. This frequently over[hung] the stone structure and in such cases [was] supported by stone corbels or wooden brackets boldly designed and placed at short intervals." These brackets, says Briggs, are a characteristic detail of many Cairene streets.

The *mashrabiya* windows of Cairo are different from those found in other parts of Egypt, in the Delta towns for example, where "a light lattice (*shish*) was formed of thin strips of fretted wood." The Cairene work distinguishes itself by "the infinite variety of forms in which the tiny pieces of turned wood are arranged and fit together and the closeness of their spacing, preventing any attempt at indiscretion."

Briggs notes that "one should not discount the effect of the sun which causes all exposed wood to shrink however well it may be seasoned," as one of the reasons for the very close spacing, which may have been wider when the pieces were first crafted.

Though Briggs observes that a unique quality of workmanship characterised Cairene *mashrabiya*, the Locke-Kings, once the proprietors of the famous Mena House Hotel during the 1880s, may have disagreed. According Nina Nelson (Mena House, 110 years of hospitality, Cairo, 1979), the couple bought all the *mashrabiya* which adorns the hotel windows and balconies — part of which is still visible on the original conserved structure — as well as many "beautiful pieces [of furniture] in Rosetta and Damietta inlaid with ivory and mother-of-pearl."

The origins of *mashrabiya* as a craft are generally traced back to the Copts but, writes Denise Amoun (*Egypte des Mains Magiques*, IFAO, Cairo, 1993), woodwork is a deeply rooted tradition in Egypt and goes back to Pharaonic times. Furthermore, the first manifestations of the *mashrabiya* technique or joinery appeared during the Fatimid era in the *mihrabs* (prayer niches) of the time. This kind of work appeared simultaneously in Cordoba, Marrakech and Fez, further proof of its regional and cultural origins. *Mashrabiya* windows were typical only of domestic architecture in Cairo. In palaces, iron grills on windows displayed floral as well as geometrical designs, while stucco grills with inlaid glass appeared for the first time during the Fatimid period, according to Doris Behrens-Abouseif (*Islamic Architecture in Cairo: An Introduction*, Leiden, 1989).

The joiners enjoyed a golden age until somewhere towards the middle of the reign of Mohammed Ali, writes Amoun. Cultural and social changes brought their popularity to an end. Mohammed Ali and his successors looked towards the West for guidance and inspiration. Egypt embarked on its modernisation programme, which included a new kind of urbanism: Egypt's large cities had to be made to look like their European counterparts. Exterior and interior decoration followed the new fashion. The joiners' craft was no longer required.

To survive, the artisans had to start producing Western-style pieces. Ironically, within half a century, Islamic architecture, including joinery, was back in fashion, the new fad sponsored this time by the West. A panel of *mashrabiya* divested of its original function suddenly became a collector's item. Parts of windows found their way to antique shops, where they were bought quite expensively for the creative motifs and the perfection of the workmanship.

In Egypt, during the 1950s architect Hassan Fathi revived the traditional Islamic architectural style, simultaneously resurrecting old traditions of wood-working. According to Amoun, he always vigorously defended the use of *mashrabiya* for windows and balconies: "A house," he used to say, "is neither an aquarium nor a shop window. Those who are living within its walls should not be subjected to public curiosity."

Today, much of the restoration work on the buildings of Islamic Cairo targets the lattice-work inlays, doors, wooden ceilings, wooden domes and *mashrabiya* windows and balconies which, in the relatively rare cases where they have survived, have undergone several centuries of neglect and emerged in poor condition, at best. An interesting case is that of Bayt El-Suhaymi — built in 1648 then transformed in 1796 — which is the object of an important restoration project headed by Asaad Nadim, famous for his reproductions of *mashrabiya* manufactured according to traditional techniques.

The doors and cabinets of Bayt El-Suhaymi are fine examples of the art of interlocking wood joinery, while the *mashrabiya* panels set into the windows are of a distinctive design, once more proof that, while the architecture of private dwelling followed a traditionally simple design, the variations in decoration details which made each one unique, were infinite.



The Marlboro cat

Spooky is a black cat. She belongs to my daughter and lives in a nice suburb in Florida. When I first met Spooky, I noticed that she looked uncannily like one of our strays. I abstained, however, from sharing my reflections with my daughter. It seemed totally uncalled-for to tell her that I had taken Spooky's twin in off the street in Cairo. For all I knew, she may have had a brand name and come with a duly stamped pedigree. There was no reason to wound my daughter's and her children's pride in their pet.

Spooky lacked feline characteristics. For one benefiting from a long lineage of well-fed ancestors, survival had never been an issue. She did not have to display the unfriendly behaviour, or even the hungry look, of Egyptian cats when confronted with a chicken leg. Actually, I don't think she knew what it was, or that there was any need to find out.

Her whole demeanour clearly indicated a firm belief that her birthrights would be respected at all times. She was not required to fight for basic needs: she was entitled to have them satisfied. She hardly acknowledged the sound of dry biscuits being poured into a plate — the same sound which causes my cats to twirl like crazed dervishes — and usually took a good five minutes coming into the kitchen, where she would inspect her breakfast suspiciously. She would choose a few bits daintily, munch slowly, and, quickly satiated, walk lazily towards the French windows where she would sit, licking herself, for hours.

Sometimes she would perch herself on the couch next to my grandchildren and watch television. She seemed to favour the programmes where excessive violence was displayed. She shared my grandson's bedroom, sleeping on the top bunk. Her deodorised, sanitised litter was placed in the laundry room. She always checked its freshness before using it and, if not entirely satisfied, would just sit patiently next to it, not using it, waiting for my daughter to notice the problem and correct it.

She lived by her own rules, indifferent to the household. I cannot say that she was displeased by my presence; nor did she seem particularly partial to me, however. Rather, she ignored me, avoiding eye contact, or any contact, for that matter, leaving the room as soon as I came in.

A couple of days after my arrival, my daughter left on a quick business trip, putting me in charge of the children, the house and Spooky. I had been given strict instructions not to smoke in the house. If I really was dying for a smoke, I was to step out, into the pool area. Before departing, my daughter made sure once more that I understood the rule. The moment she was gone, I started worrying, thinking of all the things that could go wrong in her absence. Cigarettes were the last thing on my mind.

Eventually the children were bathed, fed and tucked into bed and Spooky, having had her dinner, stretched out on the top bunk. I had managed to go through my daughter's list of things to do successfully, without missing a single item, and to celebrate, I made myself a cup of coffee. I turned the television on and was about to light a cigarette, when I remembered. I had to go outside. I had, however, already set the burglar alarm — item four on the list — and was reluctant to disconnect it (there were only instructions to do so in the morning). What if someone tried to force his way through the front door while I was sitting by the pool?

I turned the television off and listened to the silence for a while. It was ominous. There seemed to be no one around. I remembered commenting on the absence of life on my daughter's street. It was also very dark, I noticed, as I stood by the window imagining shadows silently moving in the night. My daughter had told me that she liked it that way. She needed privacy and space. The more I thought about the amount of privacy and space I was now in a position to enjoy, the more nervous I became.

I had wanted a cigarette with my coffee. Now I just needed one badly. I checked on the children: they were fast asleep, and so was Spooky. Obviously she was not required to act as a watch cat. Looking desperately around, I suddenly noticed an open vent fitted with a fan in one of the bathroom walls. By standing on the toilet, I could reach it and blow the smoke out through the vent. No one would ever know. Having checked once more on my sleeping charges, I climbed carefully onto the toilet, armed with a cigarette and a lighter. I closed my eyes and filled my lungs with smoke.

Having adjusted my aim, I was about to exhale when something caused me to freeze. Someone was standing behind me. Stuffing the cigarette into the vent, I slowly turned around, expecting one of the children. I would say that I had heard a noise and was investigating. Spooky was sitting just inside the door, examining me intently. A second earlier, she had been fast asleep. "Go away, Spooky," I whispered. Instead, she sprang up and gripped my jeans firmly from behind. She was growling. I tried to shake her off, but she was determined to drag me down, and merely dug her claws in deeper. Her growl was growing into a strident meow. I stepped off the toilet seat with a heavy thump, hoping that I would thus shake her off into the bowl. It didn't work. As soon as I touched the floor, she released her grip and slid down my leg. She nevertheless made it clear that she would not leave the bathroom before I did. Reluctantly, I walked out. She stretched out next to the toilet and remained there until morning.

When my daughter came back in the evening, everything was in order. Jokingly, she sniffed around. "You haven't been smoking in the house," she said, surprised. "I wouldn't dream of breaking my promise," I assured her. Spooky suddenly stopped munching on her biscuit and gave me a long, hard look. Then she blinked and walked towards the French windows. Turning her back on us, she started cleaning herself fastidiously.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Veal and mushroom casserole

Ingredients:
750 gms veal steaks
375 gms button mushrooms (halved)
1/4 cup plain white flour
1/2 tsp crushed garlic
1 tbsp mustard
1 cup cream
1/2 cup white wine
1 tsp dried thyme
1 cup chicken stock
Butter
Salt+pepper

Method:
Trim meat of excess fat and sinew. Cut in 1cm strips. Toss meat with flour in plastic bag and shake off excess flour. Heat butter and garlic in a heavy-based cooking pan. Add meat and cook quickly in small batches over medium heat until well browned. Drain on kitchen paper towels. Return meat to pan. Add mustard, cream, wine, thyme and stock. Bring mixture to boil. Reduce heat and simmer covered for one and a half hours stirring occasionally. Add mushrooms, season and cook for a further 15 minutes or until meat is tender. Serve with pasta and an assortment of steamed or sautéed vegetables.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Giggly girls

Andrew Steele has a hoot chez June

June should not be called June. It should be called the Hong Kong Garden and it should be in Clapham. This is the ambience of the facade, this is the demeanour of the street. The sign board flashes with coloured lights, the aluminium door screeches and bangs, one enters the dining area through a beaded curtain — and there you are, chez June.

We were seated promptly by a beaming waitress. A good job too as the parlour was bare as bare can be. Red silk prints from the monk/pagoda/concubine/willow branch school of art adorn the walls. Chinese puff ball lanterns abound. Enormous plastic grapes burgeon forth from an enormous plastic bowl. And there is an almighty red and green papier mâché pagoda.

The menu is extensive; a predominantly Chinese affair with numbers 81 to 87 comprising the "Korean Dish" section. We ordered Wan Tang (sic) soup and shrimp spring rolls to start, and Bulgogi (Korean Barbecue) and shrimp with bamboo shoots as a main course. The drinks arrived and our waitress retreated to somewhere in the nether regions of the establishment. It was then that the giggling began. Trills and titters at the outset, with the odd cackle. Don't get me wrong, one was not of the impression that they were sniggering at us. Just girls having a laugh. It abruptly ceased when the complementary kim-shee dishes arrived, which were fresh, crispy and rather hot. Chopsticks were proffered and we put them to good use. Then came the interval before the starter. The giggling became chuckling, the chuckling chortling. An indication of what was to come.

The wan ton soup was brimming with garlic and coriander and had that rather pleasing egg white consistency, so often found with an Oriental soup. The dumplings themselves, however were filled with a rather cheap and nasty mince, which detracted from what was otherwise a very pleasant bowl. The spring rolls were crisp and hot, filled to splitting with strips of vegetable and minced shrimp. Standard fare, done perfectly well.

By the time the main course arrived, the waitresses were in blue fits of hysterical apoplexy. Indeed, had one been able to see them, they would probably have been rolling on the floor. To say that they were guffawing would surely have been an understatement.

Again, the almost sinister digression from hooting to decorous silence, heralded the food. The Bulgogi was exquisite. Thin strips of melt-on-the-tongue beef, well marinated and lightly spiced, served sizzling on a cast iron sheet. Delicious. The shrimp dish was less so. Watery shrimps with no whiff of bamboo shoot. The standard sculpted vegetables and obligatory twang of monosodium glutamate. Neither here nor there. Edible but ordinary. The accompanying steamed rice was as sticky as it should be while the vegetable fried version was light, fluffy and dotted with peas, carrots, eggs and chives.

A pleasant dish of complementary cantaloupe rounded off a perfectly reasonable spread. The bill for two with two Stellas LE90, gusts of mirth evidently included.

June, 63 El Hegaz Street, Heliopolis
Tel: 2476221

Al-Ahram Weekly

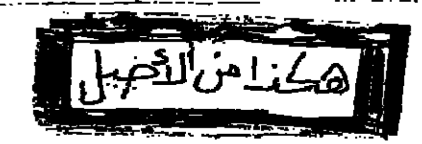
Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

ACROSS
1. The most ancient Hindu scriptures (4)
5. Tableland (4)
9. Cosmetic powder (5)
14. God of War (4)
15. Musical composition (4)
16. Cancelled; loosened (5)
17. German beer (4)
18. Female fallow deer, hare and rabbit (4)
19. Chin stubble (5)
20. Marriage vows, 2 wds. (3)
21. Describing some wines (4)
22. Open flat-bottomed container (3)
24. Actress Myrna (3)
25. Muslim religious person vowed to poverty and austerity (7)
27. Late (3)
29. Pismire (3)
30. Lively (8)
35. Flat timber used in flooring (5)
38. Short burlesque (4)
39. Portico (4)
40. Dispose of (3)
41. Ill will (5)
42. Genetic messenger code (3)
43. Kitchen appliance (4)
45. Circumspect; on one's guard (4)
46. In front (5)
48. Repentant sinner (8)
50. Billiard necessity (3)
51. A child's toy (3)
52. Dam (7)
56. Implore (3)
59. Pronoun (3)
61. Eggs (3)
62. Miss West (3)
63. Utopian (5)
65. Be distressed (4)
67. Falls behind (4)
68. Search energetically (5)
69. Poetic for "never" (4)
70. Showing in section a double continuous S-shaped curve (4)
71. Done (5)
72. College VIP (4)
73. Impudent;; suggestive of jauntiness

Last week's solution

DOWN
1. Jejeune; insipid (5)
2. Destroy gradually (5)
3. Furnishing of a room (5)
4. Call for an answer (3)
5. Diffident; not excessive (6)
6. Period of history (5)
7. Apply to law court for redress (3)
8., Assistant, abb. (4)
9. Tough elastic substance made from latex of plants (6)
10. item (3)
11. Freehold right prevailing before feudal system (4)
12. A system of credit transfer between banks (4)
13. Whirlpool (4)
21. Drown (4)
23. Stick together; tie the knot (5)
26. Trailer (3)
28. Part of barrister's attire (3)
30. Lady's garment (5)
31. Compassion (4)
32. Vetch (4)
33. Sicilian volcano (4)
34. Deparated; defunct (4)
35. Rigid support (4)
36. On the air (4)
37. Arab port (4)
38. Maximum extent between two objects, space, time, etc. (4)
41. Cleaned; rushed through (5)
44. Young form of louse (3)
46. Subtle emanation of aroma from flowers (4)
47. Pronoun (3)
49. Slaved (6)
50. Dark cave (6)
52. Type of tea (5)
53. Likeness (5)
54. Full of keen desire (5)
55. Fixed anew (5)
56. Remain (4)
57. Paradise (4)
58. Asexualise (4)
60. Crushed stones (4)
64. Hail! (3)
66. Failing mark (3)
67. Remove as superfluous; bang limply (3)



Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

189

Damietta, Egypt's third largest Mediterranean port after Alexandria and Port Said, was downgraded in 1906 from governorate to district level upon the recommendation of a British inspector. The move angered the people of Damietta who launched a strong drive to get the decision rescinded. *Al-Ahram* fully backed the campaign, *accusing the government* at one point of being completely under the thumb of British inspectors. The campaign raged for three years, ending in 1909 with Damietta regaining its governorate status, which it continues to enjoy until today. **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** tells the story on the basis of reports published in *Al-Ahram*


Illustration by: Makram Henein

Following a tour of the Governorate of Daqahliya and the Governorate of Damietta in 1906, a British inspector of the Ministry of Interior submitted a report in which he recommended making Damietta a mere district. Then Mr Mitchell, the British adviser to the Ministry of Interior, referred the report, with his recommendation for implementation, to Minister of Interior Mustafa Fahmi. Fahmi, who was also prime minister, was known to be easily manipulated by the British, so it came as no surprise when a ministerial decree was promulgated in keeping with the British recommendation. Summing up this development with the sarcasm it reserved for government actions that reveal a strong British hand behind them, *Al-Ahram* commented, "The decision which has stirred such controversy across the country is the product of a report submitted by a government inspector who, having decided that the Governorate of Damietta has few public works, aired his opinion that this governorate should be demoted to the level of a district. The Interior Ministry has obeyed his counsel as though it were an immutable revelation from God."

In complying so readily with the British recommendation, Fahmi was unaware that his decision ran counter to many historical and geographical realities. For one, it appears that he did not realise that throughout the Ottoman era, Damietta's importance as a port far outstripped that of Alexandria. For centuries, not only did Alexandria lack sufficient sources of sweet water, it also lacked easy communication routes to the interior. Damietta, by contrast, lay on the outlet of the branch of the Nile that carries its name, providing both an ample supply of fresh water and a ready water route to Cairo alongside available overland routes.

Only when Mohamed Ali began to lay the foundations of a modern state in the 19th century did Alexandria's star rise again. With the construction of the Mahmoudiya Canal, a vital fresh water artery was supplied to the ancient city and a railway line provided the essential communications link to the Egyptian capital. It took nearly half a century of construction for Alexandria to supplant Damietta as Egypt's major port.

That Damietta had occupied the status of Egypt's primary port until the 19th century was the product of important economic and political developments. The foundation of the Ottoman Empire, which supplanted the Mameluke rule in Istanbul in 1517 and the European discovery of the Cape of Good Hope combined to bring Damietta to the fore in the Eastern Mediterranean. While Alexandria had been the product of Egyptian-European relations since its founding by Alexander the Great, Damietta rose as a symbol of closer relations between Egypt and the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, notably Greater Syria and Anatolia, the seat of the Ottoman Empire. As a result of the international polarisation that arose from these developments, the Ottomans began to pursue a policy of isolationism in accordance with which they closed their ports to European ships, bringing Damietta yet closer into the Ottoman fold.

That Damietta was the country's link to Istanbul contributed to the evolution of a distinct social structure that distinguished this city from Alexandria, Egypt's bridge to Europe. This distinction became increasingly pronounced toward the end of the 19th century when Alexandria was given to rapid Europeanisation while Damietta preserved its traditional Arab Islamic character. While the former port gave rise to the adage "There is scarcely a nation in Europe that has not sent its representatives to Alexandria," few Europeans found the opportunity to stake out a successful life in Damietta. The fundamental reason for this is that Egyptian capitalists in Damietta gave little space to their European counterparts to practise their economic activities.

This Damiettan character of the city was expressed in an official complaint lodged by the merchants of the city in which they said, "As is well known, the commerce of this city is entirely restricted to native merchants. Until the present [1906] there is no bank for offering credit or loans such as that which exists in Mansoura, nor is there a branch of the National Bank. Banks have been reluctant to establish branches here because the merchants of Damietta neither engage in speculation nor in usury, rather they operate their businesses to the extent afforded to them by their available money, a virtue that distinguishes the people of Damietta."

Regarding the change in Damietta's administrative status, *Al-Ahram* remarked, "We do not understand the wisdom behind the decision of the Ministry of Interior. People are surprised because they can find no justification for the government's reasoning, a fact which demonstrates how egoistic the government can be in such matters. It appears that the government has no wish to renounce a judgement uttered by one of its inspectors as though this inspector's words had descended from heaven, from the very mouth of the Creator."

In an attempt to justify the decision, a Ministry of Interior communiqué explained: "This alteration only took place after intensive consideration of the interests of the people of Damietta and after ascertaining that it would in no way prejudice the city or its inhabitants."

The people of Damietta did not share this opinion. Nor did *Al-Ahram*. Under the headline, "The government fights Damietta", *Al-Ahram* argued, "Damietta is an ancient, commercial hub in Egypt. Yet, because it has been overtaken by Alexandria, the government has neglected it and acted to strangle this beautiful city. Its citizens have appealed to the government to open Damietta's harbour to shipping and the government's response was to deliver the mortal blow by transforming it from a governorate capital to a district centre."

Al-Ahram pointed out: "The people of Damietta will suffer multiple losses. The prices of their property will decline, the quality of life of their city will suffer and their commerce stands to lose thousands of pounds."

For that city, with its ancient links to Syria, Anatolia, Cyprus and other islands of the Mediterranean, the future looked bleak. "Damietta has 50,000 people who derive their livelihood from commerce. If it loses its standing as a governorate capital, confidence in it as a commercial centre will decline and merchants will turn elsewhere. Moreover, the inhabitants of Damietta have not been trained in agriculture, but in commerce and industry. Once trade flees, however, the city will lose its industry and its commercial houses will collapse."

The occasion proved an excellent opportunity for *Al-Ahram* to call into question the entire system of 'inspectors' introduced by the British occupation authorities into all government departments. "We would not be far off the mark to call this government the state of inspectors, since inspectors clearly have the ultimate say in all administrative affairs," the newspaper commented.

As for the people of Damietta, they did not need a signal to begin taking action once they received the news that the status of their city was to be reduced to that of a district capital. It was the news or their action that galvanised public opinion in the summer of 1906.

Their first step was to send a delegation of local dignitaries to Cairo where they first met with the British adviser to the Ministry of Finance. While in Cairo, the delegation was showered with telegrams from Damietta urging them "not to return until you have fulfilled our wish for our city to remain a governorate capital as it has always been." Intent upon pursuing all avenues, the citizens of Damietta also sent a telegram to the British High Commissioner, a second telegram to the adviser to the Ministry of Interior expressing their consternation over the situation and their hopes for a fortuitous solution, and a third telegram to the adviser to the Ministry of Finance.

On 30 May the delegation succeeded in securing a meeting with Mr Mitchell, the adviser to the Ministry of Interior. It was a stormy meeting, however, as the adviser refused to maintain a direct contact between the Governorate of Damietta and the ministry. The delegation left Mitchell's office in a fury and headed to the residence of the British High Commissioner who, in turn, refused to receive them, notifying them that their issue was the concern of the Ministry of Interior. In their frustration, some of the members of the delegation threatened that they would not remain silent and that, if necessary, they would travel to London in order to bring their cause to the Liberal Party government.

After having cooled down somewhat, the members of the delegation decided to compensate for their inability to meet with the High Commissioner by sending him an open telegram. Published in *Al-Ahram*, which read, "With the highest esteem we submit to your lordship that the Ministry of Interior has informed us that it is unable to reverse its decision with regard to the status of Damietta. We therefore have come to importune your lordship to come to the aid of our city. It is inconsistent with the current system in Egypt for the appeals of an entire city to be ignored and trampled upon. We have, therefore, come to beseech you to spare us the consequences of the ministerial decree which spells nothing but the destruction of our city.

An hour after the telegram was delivered, the delegation assembled outside the high commissioner's residence in anticipation of a response. The response was promising. Lord Cromer agreed to meet with the delegation in two days time.

In the interim, Cromer notified the delegation that the Ministry of Interior had reached a decision that they would find satisfactory.

Unwilling to be so easily placated, the delegation headed once more to the Ministry of Interior in order to meet Mr Mitchell. Although the British adviser was unavailable, his secretary informed the delegation of the ministry's decision: "The government has decided to retain the Governorate of Damietta and the governorate's budget and not to appoint a mayor for Damietta. The only item of the previous decree that has been maintained is that the Governorate of Damietta shall be administratively subordinate to the Directorate of Daqahliya which shall serve as Damietta's intermediary to the Ministry of Interior."

While officials in Cairo sought to convince the Damietta delegation of the wisdom of this compromise, the governor in Damietta undertook a similar appeal with the notables in his city. His attempts were not wholly successful. The city's dignitaries continued to insist that to make the governorate subordinate to Daqahliya would still damage the city's reputation.

Indeed, at the time it would have been impossible for the government to make any further concessions without losing face. It would, therefore, require some time before government officials could comply with the Damiettans' request in a manner that would appear as though the decision emanated from the ministry without having to yield to any form of public pressure.

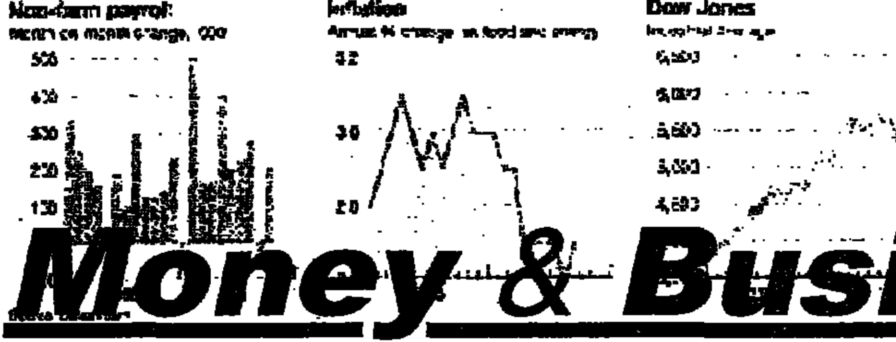
It took three years for this decision to arrive. On 26 May 1909, *Al-Ahram* notified the people of Damietta that their city would be fully restored to its former status as a governorate capital.

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.



33 new companies established

THE COMPANIES' Committee of the Ministry of Economy headed by Ahmed Fouad Atta, first undersecretary of the ministry, approved the establishment of 33 new companies, having licensed capitals of LE324.5 million, and issued capitals of LE38 million. Of these companies, 22 are joint venture companies with a capital of LE36 million and 11 companies are limited liability companies having a capital of LE1.6 million. Atta said the new companies will operate in a wide range of fields, with 9 companies in commerce, 5 in industry, 3 in contracting and tourism, and one each in banking, financing and communications.



Television's impact on society

DR MONA El-Hadidi, head of the Radio and Television Department at the Faculty of Mass Communications, said that television is a powerful medium in Egyptian society, and the primary source for viewers' knowledge of socio-economic and political affairs.

A study issued by the Coca-Cola Company's External Affairs Division, under the title "The Positive Effects of Television on the Egyptian Economy" explained that television helps a great number of Egyptians learn and keep abreast with the current economic changes and trends.

NBE finances industrial projects to curb environmental pollution

IN LINE with the National Bank of Egypt's (NBE) pioneering role on the top of the Egyptian banking system, the bank is so keen to exert mammoth efforts to propel the economic reform programme and accelerate the development process in Egypt. In that vein, NBE punches its weight against the industrial sector which is considered the cornerstone in ameliorating Egypt's economic prospects, employment and growth rates and opening new vistas for exportation. In fact, the industrial sector grips about 28.5 per cent (hovering around *LE7,533 million*) of total loans extended by NBE during the fiscal year 1995/1996.

Keeping pace with the successive changes taking place on the international and domestic arenas, NBE finances industrial projects with a view to control environmental pollution. It did well to pinpoint in this respect that nowadays, the industrial countries or the international financing institutions, namely, the World Bank, give special importance to environmental aspects in project assessment, a fact which is given much more emphasis particularly with the World Bank allocating more than US$11 billion till June 1996 of its loan *portfolio for environmental reforms* and related investments in 68 countries. The said amount would rise to $25 billion by adding joint finance and the countries' own resources. Such huge amounts reflect the serious international orientation towards taking environment protection into consideration on assessing the different project.

As far as the domestication law is concerned, Law 4/1994 on environmental protection was promulgated, giving industrial companies a 3-year grace period — ending on January 1998 — *to adjust their situations. The said law was con*comitant with economic liberalisation and the implementation of the GATT and partnership agreements. Therefore, the environmental aspects become part and parcel of economic policies, especially in the light of the LSO 14000.

Accordingly, NBE has kick-started to provide the necessary finance to cover the costs of curbing environment pollution. NBE has concluded a loan agreement with European Investment Bank amounting to ECU15 million (about US$19.5 mil*lion) with a view to rendering the industrial com*panies to finance the investment costs for environmental pollution control projects.

Taking into consideration the grant extended by the German Bank for Reconstruction amounting to DM50 million for the same purpose, the said grant includes the finance of about 25-50 per cent of the project cost as a charitable contribution. The remaining portion is to be provided by a commercial loan.

Besides, two loans were concluded with the World Bank for Development and Reconstruction and the International Development Association. The total value thereof amounts to US$35 million *(US$7 million as a grant). It is worth noting that* such a contract is unprecedented in the Middle east and North Africa.

Undoubtedly, such loans and grants oil the wheels of the present authorities responsible for supervising the environmental aspects in Egypt, curb industrial pollution in the Egyptian cities and tap the usage of modern technology.

Such financing activities are an extension of NBE's pioneering role in boosting the economic development and promoting the Egyptian in*dustrial sector to sharpen its competitiveness in* the market place via commitment to the industrial standard and maintaining a healthy environment.

Safe and speedy laser surgery at El-Ganzouri Hospital

HEALTH care organisations are looking for new ways to serve their patients in more efficient ways to reduce risk and shorten the length of stay, while minimising pain and considerable cost.

Dr Walid Elyan

Laser technology provides the answer to most patients' needs. Dr Walid Elyan, pro*fessor of Surgery* and Oncology at Ain Shams University, explained that at El-Ganzouri Hospital, the patient is admitted as a one-day case and after surgery is able to go back to work after a short period.

Laser surgery has numerous uses. In general surgery, the laser is used in laparoscopic cholecystectomy, ulcer surgery, liver tumour surgery, and pile surgery.

In urology, the laser is optimal in prostate surgery and resection of the urinary bladder tumors. It is also used in laparoscopic surgery, tubal surgery, for the treatment of ovarian cysts and tumours, as well as plastic surgery and ENT surgery.

Dr Ahmed Kashaka mentioned that one of the most useful uses of surgical lasers is in treating sleep disorders such as snoring, and *treating the paralysis of the vocal cords.*

Ghada El-Ganzouri, head of the marketing department and member of the American College of Health Care Executives (ACHE) mentioned that laser technology provides the hospital with a competitive edge by serving the contracting companies in a more efficient way through shortening the length of stay and cutting costs with *minimum risk.*

Egyptian-British Bank offers distinguished services

THE EGYPTIAN-British Bank occupies a *distinguished place* among banks operating in Egypt with all kinds of banking services available by using the latest technology.

The bank began its activities in 1992 under the name of the Hong Kong-Egyptian Bank, whose shares were divided among Egyptian businessmen and organ*isations, totalling 51 per cent, and* Arab and foreign investors and organisations taking the remaining 49 per cent. Its name was then changed to the Egyptian-British Bank to reflect its membership growth, and its inclusion in the British GSBC Association.

The banks offers a multitude of services through its automatic teller machines, which allow customers to perform numerous banking and *financial transactions,* from cash withdrawals and deposits, to balance inquiries. Through a special card given to customers, these transactions can be carried out both locally and abroad. The bank also offers its own Visa card, in addition to telephone banking which enables customers to make certain transactions from the con*venience of the telephone. Such* transactions can be conducted in both English and Arabic.

It is worth mentioning that the success of the Egyptian-British Bank in the Egyptian market and abroad did not materialise out of nothing. Rather, such a success is the result of its dedicated staff providing banking services of the highest quality to its customers.

Turq wate and w sand

Summer is here, schools are closed, and Egyptian families are making their way to seaside resorts. In recent years, Marsa Matrouh has emerged as a favourite destination and plans for further development are under way. **Zeinab Abul-Gheit** visited the Mediterranean resort and looked into its history, attractions and prospects



With Alexandria's beaches plagued by pollution, Marsa Matrouh's turquoise waters are attracting greater numbers of holidaymakers

photos: Al-Ahram

Before the 1952 Revolution, Egyptians thought of Marsa Matrouh as too far off to be a viable summer destination. They preferred closer resorts, such as Alexandria, Gamasa, Ras El-Barr and others. But after a popular film featuring the late singer Laila Murad (*Shat El-Gharam*) was shot in Marsa Matrouh, and with improvements in transportation to the resort, Egyptians began flocking to the Mediterranean resort in increasing numbers. They have been captivated by the beauty of the turquoise water of Marsa Matrouh and its fine, snowy sand.

Clubs and government organisations were the first to seize the opportunity to organise trips to Marsa Matrouh. Land was allocated for them to set up camps for their families and the resort became more and more popular. Soon, a virtual exodus from Cairo and other governorates to the site became a yearly occurrence.

It is a 500-kilometre journey from Cairo, via Agami, to Matrouh, which lies on the Mediterranean coast 290km west of Alexandria and 200km east of the Egyptian border with Libya.

Besides the area's natural beauty, Marsa Matrouh is also steeped in history. It is one of oldest cities in Egypt, built by Alexander the Great when he made his way to the Siwa Oasis to visit the Amun Temple in 331BC. Under Alexander and the Ptolemaic kings who followed him, Marsa Matrouh was called Paratonium. Some time thereafter, its name changed to Amonia, after the god Amun, before it finally took on the name Marsa Matrouh in Islamic times, when it served as a centre of trade between the Arab countries of North Africa and the Nile Valley.

Our party made its way northward to Marsa Matrouh from Cairo along the desert road first constructed some 40 years ago. The road today is a far cry from the barren route it once was; it is now a modern two-lane highway with greenery lining both sides of the road. We turned westward when we reached the coast, where the scenery has also changed. What used to be a deserted shoreline is today dotted with some 200 holiday villages, the best-known of which are Marina, Marakya and Marabella.

We made our first stop at El-Alamein, 110km west of Alexandria. This was the site of the 1942 defeat of the Germans under the command of Rommel, known as the "desert fox", at the hands of the allied forces led by Montgomery. An estimated 10,000 soldiers were killed and 80,000 injured in that decisive battle. Our group visited the Commonwealth, German and Italian cemeteries that pay homage to the events of the second world war.

At last we reached Marsa Matrouh, whose virgin sands and the fact that the area remains largely unspoiled by modern development give the place a rare charm.

Our plan was to spend several days in Marsa Matrouh and then make trips to the surrounding areas for a holiday that would combine relaxation and discovery.

Cleopatra's Bath

Our first excursion was to Cleopatra's Bath. A boat trip was organised to the site, five kilometres west of Marsa Matrouh, reputed to have witnessed the love of Queen Cleopatra and Mark Antony.

Cleopatra's famous bath is actually a huge, cube-shaped rock hollowed out from the inside. The sea gushes in from openings in each side and swirls into a natural rock basin in the interior where legend has it Cleopatra took her bath. A Sphinx-shaped rock overlooks the bath, a reminder of the glory of the past.

Ageeba

The second excursion on our itinerary was to Ageeba, 35km west of Marsa Matrouh. Ageeba means "wonder", and the name is fitting. Ageeba is a water basin surrounded by mountains of so many strata that they appear like a giant *mille feuille* cake. A wide range of colours in the surrounding area further enhances the image: the green of palm trees, white sand dunes, and the shades of the sea ranging from light turquoise to the deepest indigo.

Vendors of palm-leaf baskets and hats pursued us, tempting us to buy their wares. Everyone descended the stone stairway leading to the basin and the surrounding landscape became more beautiful at every step.

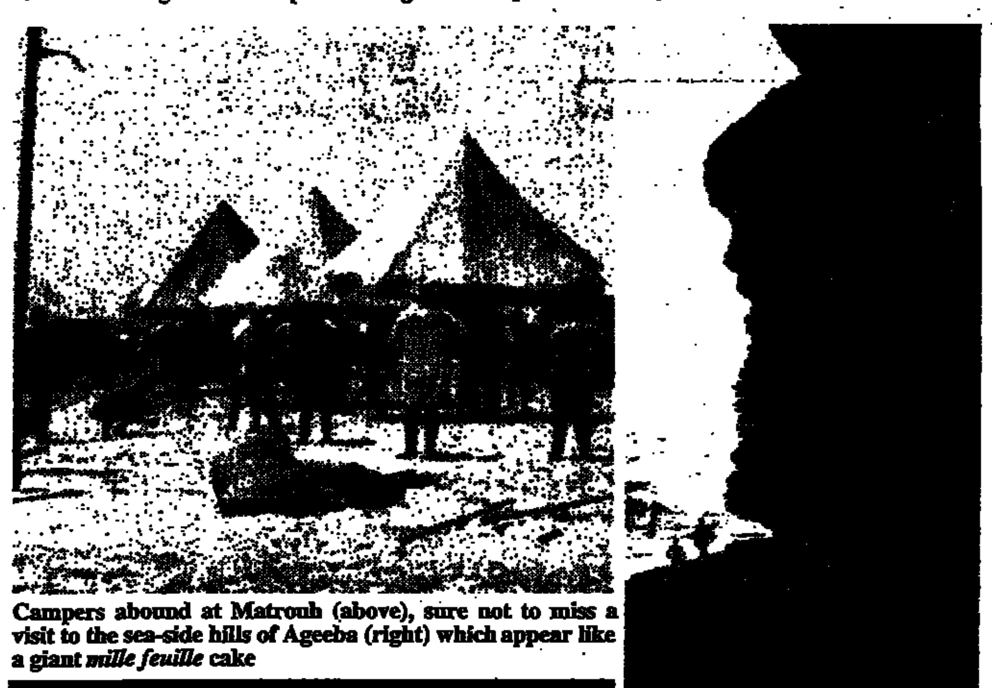
"I have been to all the countries of the world, except China and Japan, and no place on earth can compare to Ageeba," remarked one of my companions, Bothaina El-Nokaly, a housewife.

Rommel Island

Rommel Island lies in the eastern port of Marsa Matrouh. We were all eager to see the Cave of Rommel, which was turned into a museum in 1977. On entering, the visitor can see Rommel's photographs on walls on both sides. There on display are his coat, compass and trunk, as well as the Nazi flag and six maps of strategic Nazi positions in Libya and the northwest coast of Egypt.

These memorabilia were handed over by Rommel's son Manfred after the second world war when the cave was converted into a museum.

In 1992, the museum was expanded with a display of military weapons used in the war. German helmets and models of Panzer tanks and Stoka airplanes are on display in the exit passage leading to the beach. There, too, the visitor can see the last photograph ever taken of Rommel, seated outside his house with his dog.



Campers abound at Matrouh (above), sure not to miss a visit to the sea-side hills of Ageeba (right) which appear like a giant *mille feuille* cake

Royal rest house

A visit to King Farouk's rest house in Ras El-Hekma, east of Marsa Matrouh, was another worthwhile excursion. During one of his royal trips to the Western Desert in 1938, the monarch was fascinated by the area then known as Ras El-Kanais. After buying 5,000 feddans of land there, Farouk changed its name to Ras El-Hekma, reclaimed the land and established a reservoir for storing rainwater. He then ordered the cleaning of ancient wells and restoration of *saqiya* (waterwheels). Forty feddans were turned into a garden planted with apple, apricot, almond, olive and fig trees.

In 1945 the king ordered the building of a royal rest house on the pretext that it would function as a centre for combating smuggling. But no sooner was it completed than he added it to his personal property, supplied it with a private railway station, and built small rest houses for his retinue.

The rest house, which includes a dining room, bedrooms and a reception area, is open to the public.

A tale of an old hotel

One of the oldest and most famous hotels in Marsa Matrouh is the Beau Site, which is run by a family who came to the city in the fifties. Dimitry Medbek, nicknamed Mitso, his wife Mary, his daughters Magda and May and his brother Tony started their career by renting out tents and cooking facilities to a small number of customers in 1959. At that time there was no running water in Marsa Matrouh so they had to use hand-operated pumps.

In 1964, Mitso took out a loan, bought two villas and started renting rooms to visitors. Now the family owns 220 hotel rooms and operates the Beach House Hotel.

Mitso is an expert at attracting customers by providing special touches: music is played and cakes presented to honeymooners or for birthdays, when all the guests participate in the celebration. Music is also played to bid farewell to the hotel's guests. Moreover, Mitso's hotel provides games, walking trips, and a disco by night for visitors' entertainment. "The reason behind our success is cooperation between all the members of my family," Medbek said. "They work hard because the competition is intense. New hotels and beach houses have turned this once sleepy town into a bustling summer resort.

I was disappointed to discover that one of the popular attractions of Marsa Matrouh has all but disappeared. This is the *caretta* (the donkey-drawn cart) which is rapidly being replaced by taxis. A ride by *caretta* was a highlight for visitors who used to tour the city and listen to Bedouin songs sung by the drivers. Officials say that the carettas are being replaced by cabs because "donkey-drawn carts are an uncivilised means of transportation: the donkeys soil the streets." True, but what a pity to lose such a colourful and popular street vehicle. A lot of the mood of bygone days has disappeared with the donkeys.

Fatma Tawfik, director of the tourism department of the governorate, lamented that Marsa Matrouh is still not considered worthy of a place on the international tourist map: "I wish tourist offices at home and abroad would market this city. In addition to its fine climate, scenic beauty and wonderful beaches, Marsa Matrouh has Islamic, Roman and Pharaonic monuments."

Mohamed Rashad, a consultant engineer at El-Sharq Company for Tourism Development, noted, "It is true that more attention is now being paid to modernising Marsa Matrouh: new hotels are springing up, roads are being paved, and markets are being organised. However, public beaches should be expanded in order to alleviate overcrowding, and increased air communications would attract more holiday-makers."

Abdel-Moneim Said, governor of Marsa Matrouh, said that measures are being taken to address these issues: "A comprehensive plan is under way to connect the Ageeba region to a centre which will include holiday villages, hotels, entertainment and public utilities." He added that a service office has been established for investors in order to provide them with maps and help them choose suitable locations for tourist projects.

Those who want to catch a glimpse of Matrouh as it was "in the good old days" would be well advised to hasten there, because the whole area is in for massive change. The area has a promising future, as new beaches are being *made available east of the old port, development of the Rommel Museum is under way*, Cleopatra's bath is being turned into a tourist centre, a marina for yachts is being considered, and a circus, an amusement park and a theatre are not far off.

The Libyan connection

Eight hundred kilometres north-west of Cairo, a Bedouin market is flourishing in the Mediterranean resort of Marsa Matrouh. And the goods on sale come from further west still. **Amira Ibrahim** went to investigate

The customers jostle for position, their eyes sweeping the stalls and displays, poring over Libyan tomato paste, Turkish shoes, designer labels, and Asian household goods and appliances, hunting out the ultimate bargain. They come from Alexandria, Cairo, even from as far away as the Gulf states, but all are attracted by the same thing: the lure of *souq* Libya, or Libya market in Marsa Matrouh, Egypt's biggest outlet for goods coming from Libya.

Having been moved this year from the old El-Arab district to the west of the town, and the stalls replaced by concrete shops, the market is doing a roaring trade. While some of the goods are Libyan, many international trademarks are also available, and at very low prices. Cosmetics and beauty products act like a magnet for the women visitors, who pounce on labels such as Lafayette and Standhal, and Sonneti and Calvin Klein. But Mohamed Bassam, a merchant at the *souq* says, "These products are assembled in Libyan factories, which finally stick the foreign trademark on them and sell them at a fifth of their original price." Some tradesmen, however, specialise in selling original products at reasonable and very competitive prices, electrical appliances being one example, says Bassam.

"Here, a 26-inch Grunding TV set may only cost about LE2,500, one-third of its price in Cairo," he said.

Bedouin needlework, dresses and headdresses are always popular, especially among visitors from the Gulf states. One dress, intricately embroidered in a unique blend of colours and designs, may fetch LE500.

Local specialties, and spices, however, are the centre of attention for all customers, who never leave the market without buying Siwan dates, olives or nuts at rock-bottom prices. One kilo of green almonds may cost from PT60 to LE3, compared to LE18 in Cairo.

Spice dealers also sell unusual herbs which grow wild in the deserts of Marsa Matrouh and Siwa, and one of these, gall almonds is famed for its healing properties. Also available is the "Tairfas" plant, which only grows on the hills of Marsa Matrouh once a year, after the rainy season. A type of fungus, potato-like in shape and smelling remarkably like mutton, it is believed to have aphrodisiac qualities. Its popularity led to a steady rise in its price, a kilo would set you back LE800.

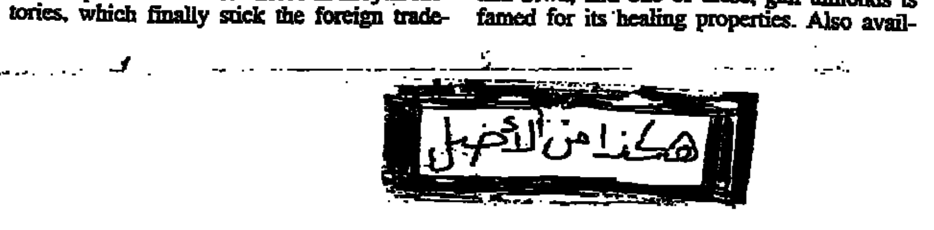
Market traders are mostly Bedouins from Marsa Matrouh and the Siwa Oasis. As Bakour Abul-Yussr, one of the leading tradesmen in the market, explains the traders from the Siwa Oasis have made the 300-kilometre trip north of Marsa Matrouh to escape poverty in the oasis. "The revenue from agriculture was hardly enough [to live on] due to the monopoly that Siwa tradesmen have on our harvest of olives and dates, and could keep us going for only two months. So we have had to start our own business at *Souq* Libya, not to make a fortune but just to make ends meet."

The fortunes of *Souq* Libya have fluctuated over the years according to the political relations between Egypt and Libya. The market first appeared in the late sixties, when Egypt was facing a shortage in consumer goods, sugar and tea in particular and smugglers stepped in to fill the gap.

In the early seventies, with Egypt and Libya enjoying good political relations and large numbers of Egyptian workers emigrating to Libya, *Souq* Libya, or *Souq* Al-Harraba (Smugglers' Market) as it became known, flourished. A branch of the *souq* with the same name opened in Cairo's El-Qalaa district.

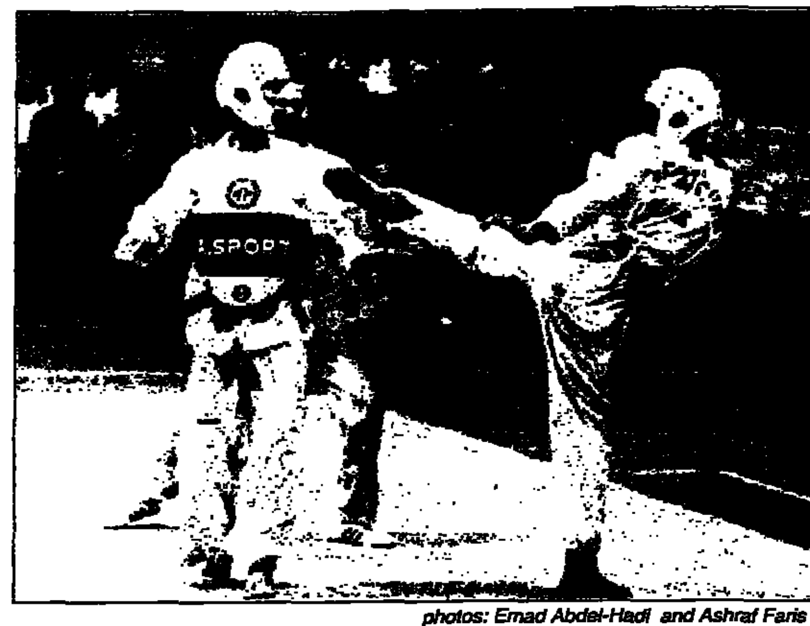
However, when Egyptian-Libyan relations deteriorated in the late seventies, following the 1978 Camp David agreement between Egypt and Israel, trade at *Souq* Libya and its Cairo branch slowed down.

When Egyptian-Libyan relations improved in the early eighties, the Egyptian-Libyan border was reopened, and business boomed once more in the Bedouin market in Matrouh. The embargo imposed on Libya by the UN Security Council in connection with the Lockerbie affair turned the Cairo branch into a major commercial outlet for Libyan commodities.









Fencing, shooting and tae kwon do: medal hopes for Egypt at the Beirut Arab Games

photos: Emad Abdel-Hadi and Ashraf Faris

Arab Games get set

The history of the Arab Games is closely linked to political events in the region. This year, teams from 19 Arab countries will compete for medals in the rebuilt sports stadiums of Beirut. Inas Mazhar reports

The Arab Games, born out of the dream of Arab unity, were the brainchild of Abdel-Rahman Azzam, first secretary-general of the Arab League. The inaugural Games were held in Alexandria in 1951, followed by the second Games, hosted by Beirut in 1957, which Egypt missed in the aftermath of the Tripartite Aggression the year before. Now, 40 years later, the Eighth Games have returned to the Lebanese capital as a symbol of its rebuilding after the ravages of civil war.

In between, the Third Arab Games, which took place in 1961 in Casablanca, Morocco, were noteworthy because Egypt and Syria, then joined together as the United Arab Republic, swept the board to win an easy first place among the nine competing countries.

The number of participating countries rose to 15 for the Fourth Games in Cairo in 1965, in which Egypt won first place.

There were no Arab Games between 1967 and 1973 because of the Arab-Israeli wars. They resumed in 1976 in Damascus, this time with only 11 countries participating. Egypt stayed away because of political tensions, and Syria won first place.

Egypt also missed the Sixth Games in Rabat, Morocco, in 1985 because of a continuing Arab boycott triggered by Egypt's 1979 peace treaty with Israel. This was the first year that women took part in the Games. They participated in eight events, while there were 17 events for men. In the absence of Egypt, Morocco dominated the games.

Egypt was back in the Arab Games in Syria in 1992, after rejoining the Arab fold, bringing the number of participating countries to 18. Egypt came second behind Syria, winning a total of 115 medals: 48 gold, 32 silver and 35 bronze.

For the Eighth Games in Lebanon, Egypt has prepared a delegation of more than 350 athletes, who will compete in 18 out of the 21 events included in the programme. A total of 19 Arab nations will be competing for the medals in the two-week event.

Rough victory

The Ahli football club pulled off a 3-1 victory against its traditional arch-rival Zamalek and drew nearer to the league trophy. Eman Abdel-Moeti reports

What used to be the league's top football match, an exhibition of skilful play and nail-biting excitement, has unfortunately become a blemish on Egyptian football. For many seasons now, the historic encounter between the two best football clubs in Egypt, Ahli and Zamalek, has turned into an angry affair where foul language, stones, and empty bottles shower the players.

With a crowd of 60,000 football fans on hand, one of Egypt's most crucial matches this season took place Friday evening. The fury of the spectators was translated into unruly behaviour by the players and instead of good soccer, the match looked more like hockey or wrestling. Spanish referee Juan Vanrich was at a loss as to how to control both the players and the spectators, who threw large quantities of stones onto the pitch. He had to stop the game numerous times due to the behaviour of the players and fans.

This 79th league encounter between Ahli and Zamalek probably indicates which of them will win the league championship. Before the match, *Ahli was one point behind Zamalek* in the league standings. Having that in mind, Zamalek seemed to start the match feeling comfortable and relaxed. But *this feeling* did not last long as it was obvious from the first moments of the match who had the upper hand.

Ahli mounted repeated attacks that penetrated the *Zamalkawi* defense. Zamalek's players looked surprised, as though they weren't expecting a tough encounter. Ahli took advantage of the confusion in the Zamalek ranks, using clever tactics and tightening their defense in the face of Zamalek's feeble attacks.

In the 15th minute of the match, Zamalek's Medhat Abdel-Hadi fouled Ahli's Hadi Khashaba as he penetrated the defence on a run towards the Zamalek goal. Khashaba's aim was true as he put the penalty kick in the back of the net to give Ahli the first goal of the game.

Ahli continued to apply pressure and launched successful penetrations of Zamalek's left and right wings. The result was another *Ahli* goal five minutes later on a rocket from the leg of Hossam Hassan. Ahli proceeded with great confidence, continually attacking and counter-attacking. Meanwhile, Zamalek puttered along lackadaisically and took a 0-2 deficit into the locker room at half time.

Trying to make up for the loss, Zamalek came out fired up in the second half and sustained pressure on Ahli with a series of strong attacks. But quick counter-attacks by Ahli foiled Zamalek's efforts to regain their fast-fading honour.

In the 56th minute, Zamalek's technical manager Farouq El-Sayed suddenly decided to put Ahmed El-Kass in the game. El-Kass promptly managed to score Zamalek's only goal. Why was El-Kass confined to the *bench* all *that time?* This will be a question Zamalek's management will have to answer to their team's fans. As the match was winding down, Zamalek's *Medhat Abdel-Hadi* again committed a penalty against Ahli's Hadi Khashaba, who put his team up 3-1 for good.

The rough match was a déjà vu of last year's match, which had to be stopped before the final whistle because of the players' and fans' behaviour. The Spanish referee of this year's match stopped the game numerous times, gave seven warnings, and ejected two players — Osama Orabi of Ahli and Mohamed Sabri of Zamalek. The volume of stones thrown at the players and the referee made it extremely difficult to play at times and Vanrich *had to leave under the protection* of the police after the game. Afterwards, he said the match was the most difficult one he had ever officiated.

Ahli's 3-1 victory over Zamalek put them in first place in the league standings, leaving *Zamalek two points behind in* second place. Ahli's poor performance earlier this season led to the assumption that Zamalek would eventually capture the *league title,* but last Friday's match changed those expectations.

With three matches left for each team to play, Ahli's coach Reiner Holman warned his players not to relax and become overly self-confident, saying *that Ahli has not won the league* yet and anything can happen in the remaining three matches. He *also reminded the players that* they should not rest on their laurels with a mere two-point lead over Zamalek.

Ahli's goalkeeper Ahmed *Shoubeir announced his* retirement after the team's victory over their arch-rival Zamalek. Shoubeir has not been included in Ahli's main list for quite some time, and it seems he couldn't take the apparent snub any longer. Meanwhile, three members of Zamalek's senior management had a heated argument after the game that caused one of them, Nour El-Dali, to resign.



photos: Khalid El-Fiqi



Ecstatic Ahli fans celebrate victory; Ahli striker Hossam Hassan struggles for possession with Zamalek's Mohamed Sabri

History of rivalry

— The teams first met in the league tournament in December 1948. The match ended in a 2-2 draw.
— They have met 79 times in the league tournament. Ahli won 26 times, while Zamalek came out on top 18 times. They drew 35 times.
— Ahli have scored 88 goals against their arch-rivals. Zamalek, on the other hand, have scored 65 against Ahli.
— The player with the greatest number of Ahli-Zamalek matches is Osama Orabi. He has played in 18 games since 1983.

Ahli's night of revelry

LAST Friday was the 78th Cairo derby clash between Ahli and Zamalek, but support for the two teams was as enthusiastic as ever.

After the match, the victorious *Ahlawia* (Ahli fans) took to the streets, on foot and in cars, waving the red flag. There was great commotion at the Ahli Club, which kept its doors open until midnight. Around 50,000 supporters gathered in and around the club. Players were borne aloft and carried around the grounds. There was music and dancing, and fans vied to dance with their favourite players.

Other *Ahlawia* headed for the Zamalek Club. Central security police stood three deep outside the club's grounds, as protection against invasion, either by disgruntled *Zamalkawia* or gloating *Ahlawia*. 26th of July Street, which runs past the club, was closed to traffic. The *odd car that succeeded in penetrating the* security cordons was soon chased away by the police. Kept away from the club, cars drove round in a circuit nearby, waving red flags and encircling some young men who were *entertaining fellow fans* with motorcycle tricks.

Inside the Zamalek Club, all was black. The lights were off and the fans were in mourning.

Shobeir retires in anger

AHMED Shobeir, Ahli's and the national *team's goalkeeper, announced his* retirement after Friday's match, following a long and outstanding career. He was leaving the game, he said, because he felt Ahli had neglected him. "I don't know why I've been left out of this match and completely ignored, even though I have completely recovered from my injury," he commented.

Shobeir was very upset when he was initially refused entry to the pitch by security men. When he finally made it onto the field, fans began to cheer him, but he signalled that they should instead cheer teammate Essam El-Hadari, playing in goal.

Abul-Ma'ati dies watching

HELMI Abul-Ma'ati, one of Egypt's and Ahli's professional players in the sixties, died of a heart attack in the 40th minute of the first half of the match.

Abul-Ma'ati, who died while watching the game, had just returned from England after heart surgery.

First time for Orabi

AHLI'S Osama Orabi was sent off for the first time in his career. He received the red card for fouling another player.

Zamalek's Dali resigns

NINETY minutes before the Ahli-Zamalek match, Nour El-Dali, Zamalek's supervisor of football, announced his resignation.

"I can't carry on when other people are interfering in my job," he said. "This is why the level of football at Zamalek is *getting worse*."

Mixed signals

AHLI'S Hossam Hassan kept making the V-sign during the match. Or so it seemed. But for those in the know, he was actually signalling the number two, which is the number worn by his brother, Ibrahim Hassan.

Ibrahim is currently under a year's suspension and Hossam was trying to rouse the fans' support for his absent sibling. After the match he did a lap around the pitch wearing the number two shirt.

Crimes of passion

THREE *Zamalkawia* brothers inflicted severe head and body wounds to their *Ahlawi* neighbour after Ahli's Hossam Hassan scored the team's second goal. The man later died in hospital.

In another incident, a Zamalek fan took a kitchen knife and stabbed his *Ahlawi* friend to death in front of his friends after the match.

Bonus

THE AHLI players each received a LE3,000 bonus for their good performance.



Elwani's golden pond

Rania Elwani's recent wins fired the imagination of the nation, but the glamour was preceded by the hard rigours of endless drills. Nashwa Abdel-Tawab looks into the life of the US-based swimmer

The allure of a swimming pool could be an irresistible hot summer afternoon's dream. But for Rania Elwani, a swimming pool is more than a temporary refuge. It is a way of life. The US-based medical student, who swam to fame in the recent Mediterranean Games, has an arduous daily routine and a loving family to thank for her victory.

Elwani's day starts at 5am with two and a half hours of laps in an Olympic-size pool. Still wet-haired, the 19-year old then rushes to her Medical School. A little rest and chat *back at home* with the family after school and Rania heads back to the pool for another two hours of swimming followed by an hour and a half of gym drills. Her father, Dr Amr Elwani, and mother, Engineer Omayma, encourage their daughter to excel both in her athletic and academic pursuits.

Rania's weekend training involves exercises in mental concentration, where she learns how to gain confidence, survive stress and fight exhaustion. She has been training in Dallas, Texas, for two years under the supervision of Steve Collins of the Southern Methodist University and says that she benefited considerably from the experience. The American system helped her combine training and study in an effective manner. "Since I'm in Medical School, it would be almost impossible to do well in school and swim at the same time in Egypt." Universities in the United States encourage their student athletes to participate in competitions by scheduling their classes in a way that does not conflict with the competition schedules.

Only two weeks following the Atlanta *Olympics, Rania began* training for the Mediterranean Games. In the meantime, she competed in university meets, where her times were slower than those she would later make in the Mediterranean Games. Swimmers usually concentrate on *one major* meet every six months. The intervening, more minor meets — and there could be up to 20 of these per year — serve mostly as practice runs.

With her remarkable achievement in the Mediterranean Games — two golds and one silver — Rania was ranked eighth in the 50m freestyle and 14th in the 100m freestyle last month. Despite her achievement, Rania says that she has to work more on her style if she is going to improve her world ranking. She appreciates that chance to compete on a regular basis. "I am learning how to compete and how to gain experience from every international meet," she says.

Elwani's next championship is the Arab Games in Lebanon, where she will be competing in numerous events, including the 50m, 100m, 200m, 400m and 800m freestyle and the 100m and 200m back-stroke. Rania doesn't believe in a certain age limit for competitive swimming and she would not speculate about her long-term sporting future. "I'll just go with how I feel about the sport," she said. Right now, the darling of Egyptian sports must be feeling good.



Wimbledon wins

SIXTEEN-year-old Martina Hingis of Switzerland became the youngest Wimbledon champion this century when she rallied from a first set loss to beat Jana Novotna of the Czech Republic 3-1.

After winning the first set in just 22 minutes, Novotna was up a break at 2-0 in the third set, with a game point for 3-0, but couldn't convert. Hingis then ran off six of the next seven games to complete a 2-6, 6-3, 6-3 victory for her second Grand Slam singles title. She previously won the Australian *Open in January at the age of* 16 years, 3 months. Hingis is also the youngest Wimbledon singles champion — man or woman — since Charlotte 'Lottie' Dodd in 1887.

Meanwhile, world number one Pete Sampras of the USA blasted unseeded Frenchman Cedric Pioline off a sun-drenched centre court to win the Wimbledon singles crown for the fourth time. The 25-year-old champion scored a 6-4, 6-2, 6-4 victory in one hour and 35 minutes of sheer perfection. He hit 17 aces, conceded only *17 points on his serve, and moved just* two titles away from equalling Australian Roy Emerson's all-time record of 12 Grand Slam singles wins.

A disappointed Pioline said: "The worst thing that can happen to you when you're playing Pete happened to me today. I lost my serve at the beginning, and from that moment I was always running after the score. That's always difficult — but especially against Pete."

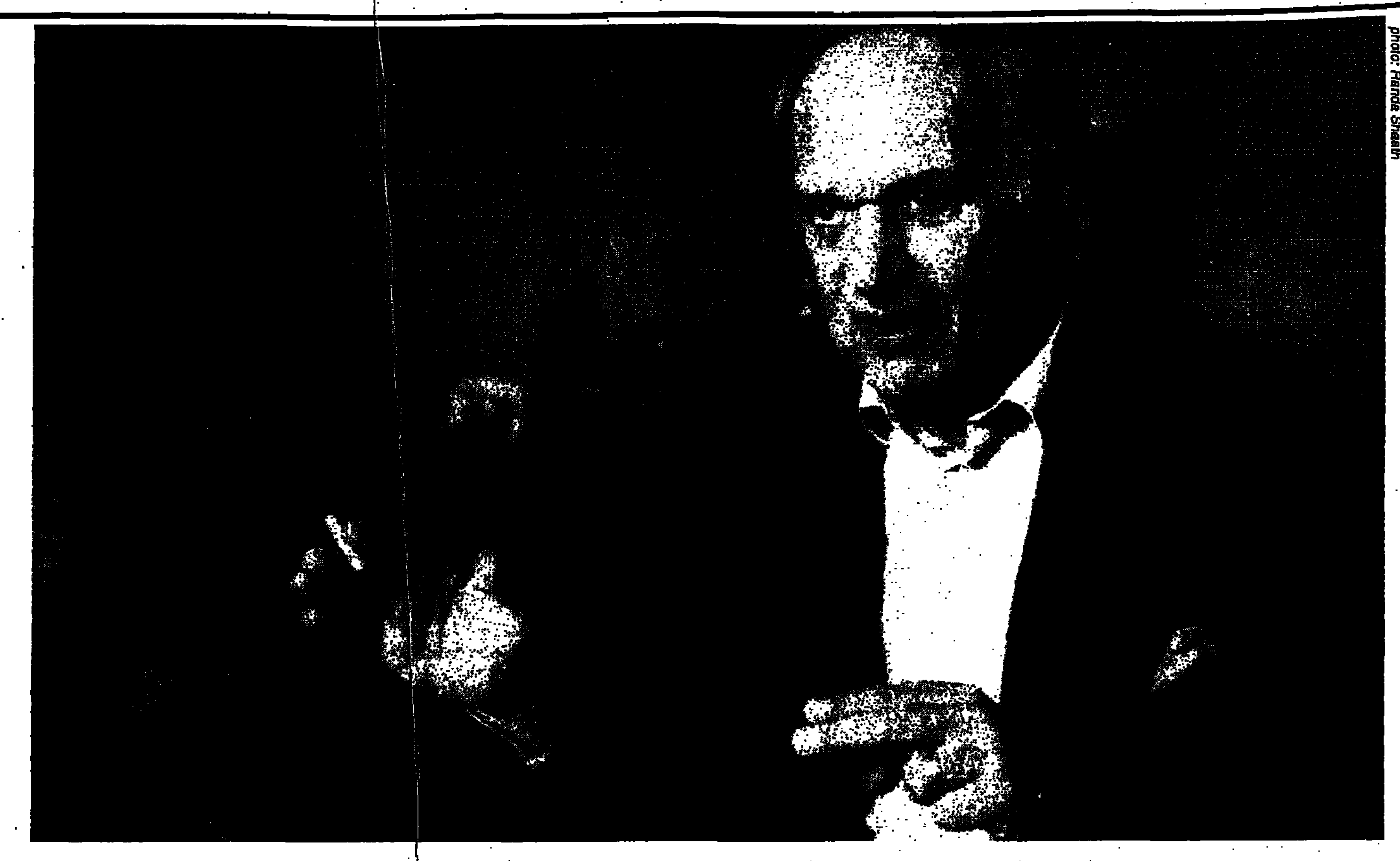


photo: Randa Shaath

Omar Khayrat:

You remember the night they arrested Fatma. And you remember the music they played

Point and counterpoint

Omar Khayrat forgot about our first appointment. When we rang the bell, a white-haired, stern-looking gentleman opened the door and informed us that he did not know where his son was. He shrugged, suggested that we wait, then promptly disappeared into the private quarters, leaving us to our own devices.

Tastefully appointed, the reception area of this old Garden City residence was furnished with sofas, tables and chests abundantly inlaid with *mashrabiya*. The surroundings were not of the currently popular neo-Islamicate variety, however. Nothing was reinterpreted or streamlined. Rather, every piece was clearly authentic, neither pretentious nor polished, with little bits missing and corners damaged here and there. The composer had impeccable taste, or an excellent interior decorator. Eventually we found out that he and his wife were responsible for the decor and had not sought professional help. The works of Gazbiya Sirry, Bikar and other famous Egyptian painters were lavishly represented on every wall. And of course, there was the piano, looming large at the centre of things.

The front door opened slowly. A very handsome young boy walked in and looked at us, displaying not the slightest trace of surprise at the sight of strangers carefully inspecting his living room. Omar Khayrat junior is well brought up and well spoken. He smiled pleasantly, answered our questions regarding his own musical tastes without undue shyness, then offered to call his father on the mobile phone which he extracted from a drawer.

We came back the next day. This time a servant opened the door, asked us to sit down, turned the A/C on and disappeared. For a long time, no Omar Khayrat appeared. We could hear a feminine voice coming faintly from the back of the apartment, discussing the needs of green plants with someone who might have been a gardener, then the soft sound of water being poured into pots. Little else was happening. Had he forgotten once more?

Finally Khayrat made his entrance and immediately busied himself with the A/C and the ashtrays. He did not acknowledge our presence directly. A tall man, he was formally dressed in a blazer and impeccable grey pants. He was perspiring profusely. "It is very hot," he said, after finally turning to face us. "I am very shy, you know," was his following sentence, "and not long ago I would have done anything to avoid you. I hate publicity and speaking to strangers." His voice is low and well-modulated, absurdly melodious for one who does not sing. It is a good voice, when one hears it.

Like the very shy, who often hide their discomfort behind a smoke screen, he is seldom without a cigarette. He tries to ignore the fact that his photograph is being taken and seems much happier when the chance to launch into his family history comes, diverting attention somewhat from himself, at least momentarily.

His father is "a specialist in building mosques," says Khayrat. "He was undersecretary of architectural affairs at the Ministry of *Awqaf*. He is known for his particular style, a typical example of which is Khalid Ibn El-Walid Mosque, near University Bridge." His grandfather was a well-known lawyer, whose intellectual salon attracted Sayed Darwish, Mahmoud Mukhtar and El-Manfalouti, among other celebrities.

"I come from a family of artists and intellectuals," admits Khayrat. "They were writers, architects, lawyers and musicians. Most importantly musicians. There was my grandfather, the lawyer, whom Saad Zaghloul appointed secretary of Maglis El-Shuyukh. He had his office nearby, in Khayrat Street. He only took the cases that he considered worthwhile. He devoted the rest of his time to supporting the arts. Then there was my uncle, Abu Bakr Khayrat, an architect by training but known today only as a famous composer. There is also my father, Mahmoud Khayrat, who besides his preoccupation with architecture, is a gifted pianist."

Omar used to wake up every morning, in the big house in Sayeda Zeinab, to the sound of his father playing Chopin, Beethoven and Mozart on the piano. The music would sing in his head all day, "it surrounded me," he says, while he tried to concentrate on his lessons.

He did poorly in mathematics, but started playing the piano well when he was five. In 1959 he entered the Conservatoire. He was just turning eleven. He eventually also received a degree from Trinity College in London. But that was much later, after his love affair with jazz and pop music had matured.

Unlike other members of his family, Omar did not embrace several careers. "I takes a genius to do that, and I don't think I am one," he says shyly. Music has always been his life: "music, and women". This is why he had to marry several times, he says. "I cannot live without a woman, but most of them are not equipped to understand that I am an artist first. They favour a nine-to-five job and a husband who shows interest in household matters on a regular basis. They hope that marriage will change me into this kind of person. It never has. I need space and often silence. I need company, of course, but suddenly I want to be alone, because I feel inspiration may be beckoning. I appear moody. Women are into being reassured all the time. They want to know if they have annoyed me in some way. I tell them they haven't, but by the time I am through explaining, they actually have. Invariably it ends up with an argument, the last thing in the world I want. So we get a divorce, but we remain good friends because finally I understand their point. I am not easy to live with. Composing is like giving birth. Imagine harassing a woman experiencing labour pains, asking her repeatedly if you have displeased her! She is in no position to protest her undying love. I often feel that way. This is when I suddenly leave everything without a word and go all the way to Alexandria to find peace in front of the sea. Such behaviour is hardly conducive to marital bliss."

If Khayrat's words seem calculated to shock, or at least to convey the clear image of an artist often subject to unpredictable, overwhelming inspiration, the bemusement apparent in his attitude begs indulgence, even affection. He is ready to criticise himself, and thus spares others this unpleasant task.

His uncle Abu Bakr's interests in music were eclectic. He composed "oriental", "popular" symphonies, created the Sayed Darwish Institute, but also headed the Conservatoire. One of Abu Bakr's arrangements Omar particularly liked to play was Sayed Darwish's *Taqtouqa* which his uncle rewrote for a choir and orchestra, then for the piano alone. The piano version played by Omar was marketed several years ago and is still treasured by jazz amateurs.

His stunt as a drummer with the Petits Chats — an extremely popular band which everyone who ever went to a nightclub in Cairo in the '60s remembers with a nostalgia approximating adulation — displeased his family immensely, his father in particular. More than just a band, the Petits Chats and other similar bands reflected the bewilderment of a generation which had suddenly lost its balance as its whole world turned topsy-turvy. While the Egyptian elite and its values seemed to have disintegrated, the new ideals had led to what was perceived, at the time, as an undeserved and unpardonable betrayal.

There was nothing to believe in any longer, and little to look forward to. A lost generation reached out towards other young people experiencing a similar angst — albeit for different reasons: the sentiments expressed so well by the Beatles, the student movements in France and the US, the protests against the Vietnam War and hippie culture in general. In Cairo, disillusioned teenagers frantically danced the nights away, sinking happily into oblivion come dawn. The Petits Chats flourished and Omar, having grown the indispensable symbol of the period, mutton-chop sideburns, drummed away. By the beginning of the '70s, all these groups had disbanded.

Like his uncle, Omar Khayrat has always wanted to reach the people — as opposed to an elite — with his music. He chose to experiment in potentially popular genres, rewriting well-loved tunes as symphonies, but never attempting to adapt classical music or opera to an Arab audience. Arabic as a language, he believes, cannot be bent to the rhythms of opera, and he has always disdained the Arabisation of music which emerges from a Western historical tradition. While the era of the Petits Chats was coming to an end, he began work on Fouad Abdel-Meguid's *Muwashahat* but it is only with the music of Henri Barakat's film, starring Faten Hamama, *Leilet El-Qabd ala Fatma* (The Night They Arrested Fatma), that he was catapulted to fame.

In 1985, Omar Khayrat embarked on a new idea: the orchestration of the most popular Egyptian songs. He produced the *Wahabiyat* from the music of Mohamed Abdel-Wahab's songs, then experimented with Umm Kalthoum's. "For Egyptians," says Khayrat, "music is transmitted by the human voice. I wanted people to realise it is only one of the elements, that the music can be there without the words." It is a daunting task, because the melody has to be written for each instrument of a full symphony orchestra. Today he uses computers a lot. "Computers make my life easy," he explains. "I taught myself how to use them once I realised their potential. Before, I had to write each score by hand, now I do it all on the computer and can listen to what I write at the same time."

Right now he is preparing a symphonic poem on the Nile. "I follow the Nile from its source and through the different countries it crosses, with their different musical traditions, up to the moment when its waters finally rejoin the sea. Through this work, I will be able to express my gratitude for the gift that was bestowed on me and the deep love I feel for my country."

Omar Khayrat is optimistic about the future of Egyptian music. "We have our own symphony orchestra and the excellent Akhenaten chamber music orchestra. We have families of musicians like the Shararas, who have attained international recognition, and world-famous pianists like Ramzi Yassa." How about his own children? They both have talent, but neither has expressed the desire to make music their career. Omar junior plays his father's music, however, when he thinks that no one is listening. "The important thing is to be allowed freedom of choice," says Omar Khayrat senior. "I was."

Profile by **Fayza Hassan**

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

❤ You know, dears, in the good old days we did not regard the *Thanawiya Amma* as a trial by fire. It was rather smooth going and we, not our parents, did most of the worrying. As I recall, my dear mother devoted herself to force-feeding me and my siblings plenty of fish — brain food, she said. Perhaps we have proven her nutritional theories wrong since then. We also had plenty of time to relax, as I recall — now, dears, don't snicker, it wasn't so long ago, and besides, many of you were right there with me, even though you were celebrating your 26th birthday once again last week... As I was saying, we had plenty of time to relax, but poor **Yasmeen Guindy** was not so lucky. She not only had to go through the harrowing experience, but had to dash to the airport before the ink dried on her exam papers to accompany her father, our Editor-in-Chief **Hosny Guindy**, on his voyage to the US. **Hosny** was due for surgery in Houston. Fortunately good news arrived soon to soothe **Yasmeen**'s frayed nerves. Not only was her dad doing very well, but she found out that she had passed the dreaded test with flying colours. The **Guindy** family will soon be back with us, and we at the *Weekly* are already busy putting up streamers. My specialty is blowing up all those lovely coloured balloons, and I am already putting the final touches on my own version of *Salma Ya Salama*. Dalida always said I was her inspiration.

♠ Many of my good friends in the cinema business are quite busy these days preparing for the fall season: they are either away or have little time for me, to my utter dismay as you can guess. They seem to have forgotten that I, too, was once a budding star.

Well, my favourite **Youssef Chahine** together with sensitive action man **Nour El-Sherif** and **Gaby Khoury**, from Misr International Films, have taken *El-Massir*, Chahine's latest film, to El-Hammamat in Tunisia. Imagine, they had not thought of inviting me to give my own rendition of *You Are My Destiny* in **Youssef**'s honour. Good thing I had the presence of mind to suggest it myself. **Youssri Nasrallah**, on the other hand, is enjoying summer in Paris finalising the script of his new film, *The City*, which will be shot in autumn both in France and in Egypt. I bet **Youssri** will be in France when *les marroniers* are in flower, and finish in time to enjoy winter in Cairo... I think I may have said too much already... but then, it is entirely **Radwan El-Kashef**'s fault. He won't even answer the telephone, would you believe, not even for a little chat about our dear friends; he is too busy editing his latest film *Araq El-Balah* (Date Wine), he says. Well, maybe when he is finished with this, it will be my turn to be busy... I also hear that he will be a member of the jury at an amateur film festival in Tunisia. By the time he is back I may have decided to forgive him, especially that **Marianne Khoury** of Misr International Films, the producer of *Araq El-Balah*, has asked me to attend **Atef Hetata**'s film debut. This gifted young man is none other than **Nawal El-Saadawi** and **Sherif Hetata**'s son, who has chosen the camera, not his family's traditional pen, to put his ideas across. *The film, I am told, will be called 95, 96* and will feature **Youssra** and **Mahmoud Hemeida**. Overtones of Bertolucci? Or Orwell, perhaps... It is **Atef**'s first film, but by the look of things, it may well be a giant step for mankind and all that. I would be well advised to hang around. You never know what can happen. I may still rise to stardom on **Atef**'s wings.

♣ Not only are my friends busy, some of them are even going away. My good friend, **Nelson Hadad Heresi**, ambassador of Chile, for one, has come to the end of his mission in Egypt. The wonderful farewell dinner party at the Gezira Sheraton was attended by many of our mutual friends. Among the guests, I spotted **Julio Cesar Franzini**, ambassador of Uruguay, **Jaime Giron Duarte**, ambassador of Colombia, **Manuelo Romero**, ambassador of Ecuador, **Virgilio Moretzsohn De Andrade**, ambassador of Brazil and **Louis Frenando Meyer Canillas**, ambassador of Paraguay. **Ismail Mubarak**, director of international relations at the Sheraton, was everywhere at the same time, busily making sure that everything was as it should be. It was good I had my *mantilla* nearby, as it came in handy for surreptitiously wiping tears away. All I can say is adios, and olé...

♦ As you may have noticed dears, everyone who is anyone, is doing the environmental thing and I am not one to be left out when I could be in... So it is with great enthusiasm that I accepted the invitation of my environmentally friendly colleagues to attend the prize-giving ceremony which crowned the competition organised by The Society of Writers on Environment and Development (SWED) in collaboration with the Egyptian Environment Affairs Agency (EEAA) and the Urban Management Programme. The subject of the competition was how to protect environment while developing tourism. **Salah Hafez** of the EEAA handed the prizes to the lucky winners, assisted by **Adel Radi**, head of the Tourism Development Agency. The winners were: **Ali El-Qammash** *(El-Shaab)*; **Wael Sharkass** (Nile TV) and **Samiha Dahroug** and **Magdi Ghoneim** (El-Sharq El-Awsat Broadcasting station).







Yasmeen; Latin American diplomats surrounding Ismail Mubarak; Environmental rewards

